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STAR

The Story of an Indian Pony

Books by Forrestine C. Hooker



PRINCE JAN

STAR: The Story of an Indian Pony

THE LONG DIM TRAIL



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STAR

Son of Running Deer, daughter of the swiftest racer of all the Comanche ponies

YOUNG MODERNS BOOKSHELF

STAR

The Story of an Indian Pony

BY

FORRESTINE C. HOOKER

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

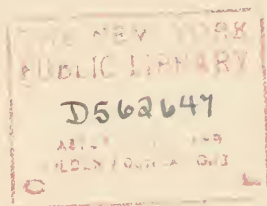
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TO
YOU, THE ONE



Like a ray of light in a stormy
sky your love has encouraged and
guided me through years when the
dim, rough trail was hard to follow.

THE
ONE
WHO
HAS
GUIDED
ME
THROUGH
THE
DARKEST
HOURS
OF
MY
LIFE

FOREWORD

THE recording of historic facts and events in the romance of a story must be interesting and instructive to the readers; especially when the scenes occurred in a vast country, formerly occupied by an ancient and departed race and later by one now rapidly disappearing.

In vain might we search history for the record of a people who contended as valiantly against a superior race, overwhelming numbers, and who defended their country until finally driven toward the setting sun, a practically subjugated nation and race. The art of war among the white people is called strategy, or tactics; when practised by the Indians it is called treachery.

Their wealth consisted of their herds of horses—which the Western Indians obtained from the Mexicans after the Spanish had invaded Mexico—their lodges and the few appliances for camp-life. They worshipped the God of nature, and the Great Spirit was their omnipotent Jehovah.

They believed that death was a long journey to the Happy Hunting Grounds. They were grateful for the abundance of the earth—the sunshine, air, water, and all the blessings of nature—and believed that all should share them alike. For one to wish to monopolize any part of the earth was to them the manifestation of a grasping disposition. Often the men of the most influence and greatest popularity in the tribe were the poorest, or those who gave most to others.

They believed that the Great Spirit had given them this beautiful country with its natural resources, advantages, and blessings for their home.

One great cause of disaffection among the Indians was the destruction of their vast herds of buffalo, which seemed like ruthless sacrifice. Within a few years millions of buffalo were killed for their hides, and thousands of white men, the best rifle-shots in the world, were engaged in the business.

Among their own tribe and people they had a code of honour which all respected. An Indian could leave his horse, blanket, saddle, or rifle at any place by day or night and it would not be disturbed, though the whole tribe might pass

near. This could not be done in any community of white people.

These conditions existed in 1874, when the Southwest Indians assembled at Medicine Lodge and decided to drive out the buffalo hunters.

In August, 1874, I was directed to organize a command at Fort Dodge, on the Arkansas River in southwestern Kansas, and move south against the hostile Indians. Other commands were ordered to move: one east from New Mexico, under Major Price; one north from Texas, under General Mackenzie; one west from Indian Territory, under Colonel Davidson, Tenth Cavalry.

My command consisted of two battalions of eight troops of cavalry, commanded by Majors Compton and Biddle; one battalion of four companies of infantry, commanded by Major Bristol; a company of friendly Indians, a detachment of artillery, and a company of civilian scouts and guides. These latter were mostly hunters and expert riflemen, familiar with the country.

In one of the many engagements with the hostile Indians Captain Frank D. Baldwin (now

Major General) a very gallant officer, recaptured two little captive white girls, Julia and Adelaide Germaine, seven and nine years old, whose father, mother, brother, and older sister had been massacred. From the children we learned of their two sisters, still in the hands of the savages, and we made it a condition that they should be brought in safely and surrendered with the whole tribe, which was done immediately on receipt of my demand. The other two girls had been brought by order of Chief Stone Calf to a tent next his own, where they were treated with marked care and consideration until formally surrendered to us.

That campaign, lasting for many months, closed after most difficult and laborious efforts on the part of the troops, with the satisfactory result that the vast southwestern country has been free from the terrifying and devastating presence of hostile Indians, and the citizens of the States of Kansas, Colorado, Oklahoma, Texas, and New Mexico have enjoyed an era of peace. Scarcely a hostile shot has been heard in that country since that year.

In a report to Lieutenant-General P. H. Sheridan, Commanding General of the U. S. Army,

FOREWORD

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November 23, 1874, which was published in report of Secretary of War, Vol. I, 1875, I said:

“It would have been better for the Indians had they been considered a part of the population of the United States and dealt with generously; and when forced on reservations—which is always the case—let reservations be reasonable in size, subject to special rule and government until the Indians are fitted to obey the ordinary laws of the country which have been made to control educated and intelligent white people.

“If the Indians had always been humanely and honestly dealt with, there would have been but few of the troubles which have occurred in the many years gone by.”

Nelson A. Miles
Lt General U.S. Army

July 21, 1922

Washington, D. C.

STAR

The Story of an Indian Pony

STAR:

The Story of an Indian Pony

Chapter I

THE first streak of dawn was turning the sky from gray to pale pink as Star lifted his head and looked sleepily at the twelve hundred Comanche ponies stretched on the ground around him.

Farther away were many tepees made from buffalo skins, but only the wolf-dogs, curled in holes they had dug near the tepees, showed that the camp was not deserted. Star knew that the Comanche braves, squaws, and papooses would soon awaken and come out wrapped in blankets which had been woven by the squaws and dyed in bright colours made from roots and berries.

One tepee, larger than the others, belonged to Quannah, Chief of the Quahada Comanches, and Star looked at it as he recalled the story his

mother, Running Deer, had told him many times while they grazed side by side or rested on the banks of the creek near the camp. Star loved Quannah, but more than all else he loved Quannah's little daughter, Songbird, for she was Star's mistress. He remembered the day when he had been too tiny and weak to stand up, and Quannah, with Songbird, had stooped to pat Running Deer's colt.

"We will name him Star," the chief had spoken. "He belongs to you, as his mother belongs to me, and as his mother's mother belonged to my father. Swift, sure, and strong, they have been worthy to carry the Chiefs of the Quahadas."

So the colt understood the honour given his mother and the honour that was to be his when he was big enough to be ridden. And the tale his mother told many times never wearied him.

"My mother told me the tale," she would always begin, "and now that she is dead I tell it to you. When I am dead, you shall tell it to other ponies, so that it may be remembered as long as Comanche herds wander over the plains.

"The squaws tell their papooses the great deeds of their forefathers, that none will forget, that

the young boys may become great warriors, while the girls grow to be worthy squaws and train their own sons to live with honour. So I, too, tell the story of our part in the life of our great Chief and his Pale-face Mother, as my mother told it to me, long ago, before you were born.

“When she was a very young mare, the swiftest racer of all the Comanche ponies, our tribe wandered long distances over plains covered with grass knee-high. Vast herds of buffaloes and thousands of beautiful antelopes shared the prairie lands with us. When the teepees were set up there were so many that they reached out like stars covering the sky at night. Our pony herd was so large that each brave owned many ponies, and he who owned the most ponies was the richest man of all.

“The Comanches could not live without us. It needs a swift, sure-footed pony to follow the antelope near enough to send an arrow to its heart as it runs. You know, as well as I, that antelope meat must be brought to the camp to feed the women and children. Because the Comanches are such great hunters, other tribes call them the ‘Antelope Eaters.’ And from the

hundreds of buffaloes ranging on the plains, our warriors obtain hides for clothing, for warm robes and to make tepees that will defy the cold winds and snows that rush upon them from the place where the Great White Spirit of Winter dwells.

“Without good ponies the Comanches would be cold and hungry, as you must see. And so we are honoured by the warriors and loved by the women and children for whom we provide food and shelter. When the enemies of the tribe come against us in battle, the ponies share the dangers with their owners. None of us has ever been vanquished. Ponies have died beside their masters, but have never deserted them. When a warrior dies, his favourite pony dies with him, that the warrior may ride it in the Happy Hunting Grounds to which he and it have journeyed through the Land of Shadows. There they are happy together. That is a great honour, but the greatest honour of all is to be the favourite pony of the Chief.”

“Like you!” interrupted Star with a proud toss of his head as he glanced at other colts whose mothers belonged to men who were not chiefs.

“Like me and like my mother,” Running Deer

never failed to answer. "Lie down beside me while I tell you the tale again, so that you will make no mistake in telling it to other ponies when you are old and others have forgotten it all."

Star settled himself comfortably at her side, and as she talked, he nipped daintily at bits of tender grass which made a soft bed beneath overhanging branches of a tall tree.

Chapter II

LONG before I was born," began Running Deer, "the warriors of our tribe wove bits of red cloth into the manes and tails of their ponies. Each warrior, decked in brightest blankets and with war-bonnets of eagle feathers that bound their heads, fell over their shoulders, then trailed almost to the ground, rode rapidly across the prairie with their quivers full of sharply pointed arrows.

"White-faced men had come on the land of the Comanches and were taking possession of our hunting grounds. So word was brought to camp for our fighting men to go out and protect the game that belonged to the Indians. The Great Spirit put the game on the prairies that the Comanches and other Indians might use it for food.

"Like leaves swept by fierce winds the warriors rushed onward. Peta Nocona, the old chief's young son, rode my mother at the head of the Quahadas. He was almost a child in years,

but a man in daring, and often the chief gave him the honour of leading the warriors. All at once in the distance a few specks caught his keen eyes, and he drew my mother's reins, while all the Comanches halted to talk. Then each warrior leaned down against the shoulder of his pony, and they raced until they had formed a large circle around the moving spots. Gradually closing about them, Peta Nocona led his men.

"My mother said that those in the centre greeted them. It was Pa-ha-u-ka's band, and with them were a boy and a girl with white skins, who looked at the Comanches in fear. The girl's hair was long and gold like the arrows of the sun, her eyes were like the summer sky, her skin like untrodden snow.

"The son of our chief rode to her side, and when she shrank back in fear, he smiled and told her that no harm should come to her. She did not understand his words, for she spoke in a strange tongue, but she did understand his kindly eyes and voice and smile. So she made no struggle when he lifted her from the arms of the warrior who was holding her. Placing her before him on my mother's back, he held her carefully until they reached our camp."

“Did the white boy come, too?” asked Star as Running Deer paused to take a bite of grass.

“My mother said that the boy did not come into our camp and she did not know where he went. Part of the Comanches, who belonged to Pa-ha-u-ka’s band, followed another trail and were gone a long time. But the little white girl was not unhappy, for she had our chief’s son as her companion. We called her Preloch. All the care that would have been given to the daughter of our chief was given to her until she reached womanhood. Then she and the chief’s son, Peta Nocona, were married with great feasting and dancing that lasted many days, and everyone was very happy for they all loved her and the chief’s young son.

“When the old chief, worn with the weight of many winters, slept with his forefathers, the young chief ruled in his place. There was much rejoicing when a son was born to Peta Nocona and his golden-haired squaw, Preloch. They called him Quannah, which, as you know, means ‘Fragrant.’ Later a little daughter came to them, and her name was Prairie Flower, for she was so pale and delicate that it seemed as though a rough hand could crush her, or a strong wind

carry her away on its breast. The warriors honoured and obeyed Peta Nocona, who became a great War Chief, and the women, children, and ponies loved his white squaw, Preloch, for her gentle ways. Wherever he went, she rode at his side, her baby daughter clasped in her arms, while little Quannah followed closely behind on his pony, often shooting arrows as he rode.

“The young chief had given my mother, Blackbird, to Preloch, and I was a colt, past two years old, when white men found our camp. I do not know just what happened, for in the darkness of night Gray Beard, Big Wolf, and Spotted Leopard led me into a strange place among great trees, and there we found Quannah waiting us. They spoke earnestly to him, then he leaped to my back and we dashed away.

“For many days we were alone, except when a warrior came and sat talking gravely. I heard Karolo, the Medicine Man, tell Quannah one day, that the white men had taken Preloch and Prairie Flower away with them. Then he told that his mother had sent a message, bidding her son remain with his father’s people and rule them wisely and justly. She did not want to leave her son and the Comanche people whom she

loved so much, but she had been made a prisoner by the white men and they were taking her and her baby away to their own homes."

"Why?" asked Star, wonderingly.

"I do not know," answered Running Deer. "I am telling the story as it all happened. How could an Indian pony understand the white man's ways, when the wise men of the tribe did not understand? My mother told me the story of the little white girl, and I heard what the old warriors said to Quannah while we hid in the mountains; but I do know that neither Preloch nor Prairie Flower ever came back to us again, and Quannah never saw them again.

"That is all I know. Quannah rode me back to camp and when you were born he gave you to Songbird. You must serve her as faithfully as I have served him, and as my mother, before me, served his father, Peta Nocona. The big chiefs also told Quannah that his father, Peta Nocona, had been killed by the white men as he stood, wounded, against a tree, singing the Death Song of the Quahada Comanches. So Quannah, his son, became our chief."

Star thought about the story as he lay beside his mother, and he felt very sure that he would

not make any error in telling it when he had grown old. The sun peeped over the edge of the world and shot a golden arrow of light into the pony's eyes, to warn him and the other ponies that it was time to roll and get up.

It was not an easy thing to roll over. Star had tried it many times, for his mother had told him that when a pony could roll completely over the first thing in the morning, it was the sign he was very strong. So now he stiffened his muscles and tried it, but only got partly over. Again he tried and failed. But the third time he turned completely over, and full of pride, leaped to his feet. Then he leaned down and nipped his mother, who blinked up at him.

"I did it!" he bragged, tossing his head so that the thick black mane waved like a flag. "Mother, I rolled all the way over, this morning."

"I knew you would do it," she answered proudly as she scrambled up hastily. "Now you can carry a man."

The two ponies saw the flap of Quannah's tepee lifted, and their ears cocked sharply. A little girl, about six years old, with large dark eyes, long glossy braids hanging to her waist, and clothed in a garment of buckskin, with moc-

casins of buckskin on her feet, stood in the opening of the tepee.

“Star!” she called softly yet clearly.

The pony answered with a low nicker of delight, tossed his shaggy mane, kicked his hind heels and galloped to her side, where he bent his head that she might pet his nose and pull his ears gently, while his eyes told her how much he loved her.

Chapter III

EVER since Star had been strong enough to bear Songbird's weight on his back, they had wandered together near the camp. Sometimes they climbed the steep mountains so that they could look down on the tepees which seemed only tiny white spots; or they raced after a coyote across the prairie, and again they moved more slowly beside the streams where they could see silvery fish darting from one deep pool to another.

Always Star watched carefully that he might not step on a loose rock, or into a prairie-dog hole. That would make him stumble and throw his little mistress, and Star's mother had warned him of the danger. Many times they paused beside the stream so that Star could thrust his velvety nose into the cool ripples, while Songbird, higher up the creek, would lie flat, face downward, and touch the water with her lips.

At times she would sit in the shade of a tree near the stream and Star would lie down beside

her. Then she would pluck wild flowers and weave them into his mane and make a wreath of them for her head, while she told the pony that the big, white clouds drifting slowly over them were the tepees of great warriors who had gone to the Happy Hunting Grounds, where they rode their favourite ponies all day long. But when the Spirit of the Sun rode over the edge of the world at night, the warriors followed him that the Spirit of Darkness might not overtake them, and the clouds followed after them.

One morning Songbird came to him and said, "There is a long journey for you to-day."

As she patted his neck, he noticed unusual excitement in the camp. The warriors were gathering the pony herd instead of letting it wander to graze until night. Men were rushing about, and the squaws were taking down many tepees. Some of the men were helping them roll things in buffalo robes which they tied with long thongs cut from cured hides. Then these bundles were placed on the backs of pack-ponies and fastened so that they could not slip off. Even the children were helping instead of playing about.

Quannah was directing everything while he stood near his tepee, a short distance from

Songbird and Star. At last the packing ended and the warriors, mounted on their best ponies, moved slowly away from camp, while behind them came extra ponies and then, still farther behind, trotted the pack-ponies.

As Star watched, wondering what it all meant, an Indian led Running Deer to Quannah. The chief spoke hastily yet tenderly to Songbird, who listened seriously to his words. Then Quannah sprang to Running Deer's back.

Songbird slipped her arms about Star's neck and he felt her soft lips touch the white spot in the middle of his forehead. He was a jet-black pony except for this white mark which formed a perfect star, and which was almost hidden by the heavy forelock of hair that dangled to his eyes.

Quannah sat on the back of Running Deer, and watched Songbird, who turned suddenly and spoke.

"I have no brother! Let me go with you?"

"You must stay here with the women and children," Star heard the chief reply. "We go to meet men. It is safe here for the women and children. You must stay with them until I return."

The pony saw that all the Comanche herd was moving away from the camp, and he turned quickly to his mother.

"Must I stay, too?" he asked anxiously.

"No," she replied, "you go with me, so that Quannah may ride you to rest my back on the journey. It will be hard riding for many long days. We go to fight the white men and if we find them, many warriors and ponies may never come back. You are old enough and strong enough now to do your part in the work of the Comanche ponies. Come, keep beside me and I will tell you what to do."

Star felt very proud and important as he trotted at his mother's side, but he could not help twisting his neck to look back now and then at his little mistress who stood alone in front of the big tepee of the chief. He saw her stretch out her arms toward her father, but Quannah did not see her do it. Suddenly she drew a corner of her blanket over her head, so that her face was hidden that none might see her grief; then she turned into the tepee and the flap closed.

While Star had been watching all this, the other ponies had moved past him, and he heard his mother calling angrily, urging **him** to hurry

to her side. She was in the lead. Far ahead of Star the ponies were moving swiftly. Some carried packs, others bore warriors, and the unmounted ponies of the herd were kept from straying by warriors who rode on either side. Not one Comanche pony had been left in the camp where the women and children now remained. It was all very strange. Star galloped to his mother knowing she could explain everything, for she was a very wise pony and the favourite of the chief. She was very angry, and snapped at his shoulder when he reached her side.

“You are disgracing me when you lag at the back of the herd. You belong at the front of it, with me. The chief’s pony travels ahead of all the others.”

“Where are we going?” he asked after a short silence.

“I do not know,” she answered, still angry. “That does not concern either of us. When the chief speaks no one questions and all obey. He gives orders to the warriors and they do his bidding. He moves his hand and I obey the rein. That is all I know. Ponies do not need to know anything else. Your duty now is to follow me

and keep at my side, so that you may be near if I fall or am hurt or weary. Then Quannah will ride you."

As they travelled many miles, Star kept closely beside his mother, but he could not forget Songbird and how she had held out her arms, then with covered face had gone alone into the big tepee of her father, the Chief of the Quahada Comanches.

Chapter IV

AS STAR travelled contentedly beside his mother in the days that followed, other Indian tribes crossed the trail of the Comanches, some of whom came from the far north. They had seen the white men, whom they called soldiers. Sometimes there had been fighting.

Kiowa riders often rode strange ponies into Quannah's camp and rested for a few days. While the Indians talked with Quannah and his braves, the ponies of the strangers told the Comanche ponies about the big bands of white men, all dressed alike, riding very large horses, many of which were almost twice as big as a small pony.

"These men do not carry bows and arrows like the Indians, but have shining sticks that roar like angry buffaloes and which spit fire that kills any Indian or pony it touches," explained a pony from the Kiowa Indians' camp.

Running Deer shivered and looked at Star, as she said, "My mother saw such men. She called them soldiers, and she, too, spoke of the sticks of fire that slew our braves and our ponies, though they were so far away that arrows could not reach them."

The ponies stopped talking as they saw Quannah and a Kiowa messenger reach the herd. Star cocked his ears so that he might hear all that was said. Running Deer touched her big colt with her nose, to remind him that he must keep perfectly quiet, for Quannah's hand rested on Star's mane and the chief looked at him with serious eyes while the Kiowa Indian talked in a low voice. At first Star could not understand what they said, but in a short time he heard more distinctly.

The Kiowa brave was speaking. "Our Medicine Man, who is so wise and good that the Great Spirit talks to him, has told our Big Chief that we must drive these white people from our land, so that none of them shall ever come back. Then the antelope and buffalo will belong to us, our ponies will roam where the grass grows most thickly, and our people will be happy and thrive."

“I wish to live peacefully with the white people. My mother was of their race,” answered Quannah slowly.

“The white men will not dwell peacefully with the Indians. Many times our fathers’ fathers moved to avoid conflict, but the white men have always followed and whenever they found us they have warred with us,” the Kiowa interrupted angrily. “Even now they are gathering in great bands, and making ready to sweep upon us from all four sides of the earth at once, hoping to scatter us like dry leaves before a wind-storm. Soon we shall be driven to the edge of the earth. Then only the cold ashes of our camp fires will be left to tell the places where our children once dwelt.”

“Yes, that is true,” the Chief of the Quahadas spoke, and his head sank so that his chin rested on his breast, while his eyes were fixed on the ground. “My mother, Preloch, bade me rule the Quahadas wisely. If I war on the white men, they will come in still greater numbers, and my tribe will suffer. But the white men killed my father and took my mother and sister away. My mother did not want to leave us, and she sent word to me by old Moko, the Picture-maker,

that she would try to escape from the white men and come back to me. Maybe she is dead now. When the sun shines on the winter snow, no one can bring it back. But the moisture sinks into the heart of the earth where the flowers are born. So though my mother has never come back to me, the memory of her words lives in my heart. I wish to rule my people wisely and help them. Maybe it would be best not to fight. I will ask my warriors. What they say, that will I do!"

When the Quahadas had gathered about their chief and the Kiowa messenger, the Kiowa spoke quickly.

"My chief sent me to ask whether Quannah, Chief of the Quahadas, will join us and lead your tribe to help us save our people from the white men who will kill the Comanches and Kiowas, take our children and squaws captives, and laugh at our humiliation. Shall I go back and say to my chief that Quannah, Chief of the Quahada Comanches, is a squaw because his white blood is afraid to fight his mother's people who stole her?"

Quannah's eyes flashed angrily, and he flung out his hand while he replied, "Tell your chief

that I and my warriors will fight against the white men because we must save the game and grass and protect our women and children. That is all. Go!"

Star and Running Deer watched the Kiowa messenger leap on the strange pony's back. Then, with a shrill call, the rider was lost in a cloud of dust that arose from the swiftly running pony, while Quannah, surrounded by his warriors, looked after the vanishing Indian.

"Why should the white men drive us from our camps?" asked Star as he turned to his mother. "We do not drive the Kiowas from their camps, and the Comanche ponies graze beside the ponies of other tribes, for there is grass enough for us all."

"White men are different from ponies," answered Running Deer. "That is all I know. Maybe the white men war among themselves and destroy each other's camps, and carry away the women and children as prisoners."

During that evening, when the shadows grew longer and darker, and the huge campfire sent shafts of light like golden arrows between the trees, the warriors gathered in consultation.

Their faces were very stern as they seated themselves on the ground in a half circle, while Quannah and the Medicine Man faced them. The Medicine Man was very old. The face he lifted toward the stars was wrinkled, his raised hands trembled, and the words he spoke to the Great Spirit asked that help might be given the warriors so that the grass and game might be saved for the tribe.

While he was speaking, coyotes yelped from the darkness beyond the light of the camp fire, and Star, standing very closely against his mother, twitched nervously and kept looking backward to see how near the coyotes might be. All the ponies understood that a band of coyotes would chase any pony if it were alone, and if they overtook it, they would tear it to pieces. So when a bunch of coyotes came near the pony herd, the mares surrounded the colts in the very centre of the group, keeping their noses closely against the colts, and the mothers would lash out their heels and protect them. But fear of a band of coyotes never died as the colts grew older.

“The warriors are holding a War Council now,” Running Deer told Star. “Our wise old

Medicine Man will tell them what the Great Spirit tells him. Then he will bless them that the strength of the Great Spirit may enter their hearts and help them conquer their enemies and save the game and the grass."

Through the night the fire burned brightly, while the Comanches sat in a large circle talking together. Star, waking many times, lifted his head that he might watch the warriors who faced the Medicine Man and Quannah. Once the pony half rose to his feet, but Running Deer kicked at him as she lay beside him.

"Lie down and be quiet," she whispered angrily. "It is not dawn yet. You will waken the other ponies and they are weary. What is the matter with you to-night?"

"I want to go back to Songbird, Mother," he answered. "If the white men find the camp they may take her away as they took Quannah's mother and sister, and she may never come back again!"

"Quannah would follow them and get her back. He loves her more than anything else," Running Deer said.

"But all the Comanche ponies are here with us," Star went on anxiously. "If I go back to

her, she could ride swiftly from the white men, if they try to capture her."

"Stop talking so foolishly," snorted Running Deer. "Quannah is wiser than you are. He will guard her from harm. Go to sleep at once, for we have many miles to travel yet."

Chapter V

WHILE Star was travelling with the other Comanche ponies, he thought many times of Songbird and wondered what she was doing without him to share her days. If he had known the loneliness of his little playmate, he would have raced back to her, even though his mother had told him that his duty was now beside her so that Quannah might ride him.

Meantime, Songbird wandered sadly among the tepees where the other children played happily while their fathers rode with Quannah to fight the white men. The squaws tried to interest her in the work they were doing, and took the best bits of venison and thrust green willow twigs through the meat, so that she might hold it in the campfire and cook it.

Songbird smiled gravely when they did this and shook her head. She was not hungry, but the other children crowded up noisily and ate the crisp tender meat, laughing when one child held

his stick too long, so that it burnt and let the meat fall into the hot wood ashes from which he at once fished it with his twig.

New clothes, fashioned from soft buckskin, new moccasins made from buckskin with soles of tough buffalo hide, were laid in her father's tepee for Songbird. Though she put them on, she did not run to show them to the other children. Always she had hurried to her father first, that he might praise her new things. As she remembered it, she slipped away alone to the edge of the creek near camp. Sitting beneath the tree where she had woven the wild flowers in Star's mane, she wondered when her father would come back.

"If he had left Star with me," she said at last, as though the fishes in the creek could hear her and understand, "I could follow him when it grew dark, and if I found him he would not send me back."

But the fishes did not pause to listen, and at last she rose and went back to the camp. The buffalo calf, tied by a plaited rope made of strips of cured hides, rubbed its thickly haired head against her shoulder, and pretended to fight her, but she did not laugh at it as she had always

done while her father stood beside her. She changed the calf to another place, and fastened the rope carefully; then, having brought fresh water to it in a bucket made of dry hide, she went into the big tepee.

Her pet horn-toads were kept in one of the deep pottery bowls made from dirt and clay, then set in the sun to dry and harden. She carried the little creatures outside and let them run about on the ground and eat small insects. The bright orange, black, and red colouring of their backs made a beautiful design and looked as though an artist had painted them. Each head had a circlet of small sharp horns, while two larger ones stood up very **fiercely**, and all over their backs were other tiny horns, reaching to the tapering tail. Songbird knew the horn-toads could not hurt her with their many horns, nor could they bite, for they had no teeth.

After eating, the toads became sleepy, so she placed them back in the bowl and carried them to their accustomed place in the tepee.

“Caw! Caw!” a crow croaked outside, and Songbird hastened to the black, shining bird that walked jerkily at the entrance of her home. Its beady eyes blinked up at her, and its head twisted

sidewise in a very knowing manner; then it straightened up and gave its hoarse call, as though it had a sore throat.

“Caw! Caw!”

She did not clap her hands to-day and imitate its cry, but moved quietly into the tepee and soon came back, holding a deep earthen bowl which she placed on the ground. The crow sidled up, cocking its head to see if anything were coming upon it from the sky or from the back. Satisfied that no robbers were near, it began eating.

Songbird watched it as she sat on the ground with her knees drawn up and her hands propping her chin. Very gravely she decided that the crow was getting fatter.

For several months she had cared for it. Some accident had happened to its upper bill and half of it was gone, so the crow had not been able to pick up food from the ground or eat anything solid as the others could do when they pecked very hard. It had been almost dead from starvation when Songbird noticed it lying in the camp. She had driven away the other children who were teasing it with sticks.

Her father had shown her how to fix soft food

in a deep bowl so that the poor crow could thrust its entire beak down deeply to eat the moist mixture. So day after day it came to the tepee, knowing it would find food. The meal finished, it always bobbed and stalked around, repeating its cry, "Caw! Caw!" until at last it flapped its glossy wings and darted high above Songbird's head. But even when almost out of sight she could hear it calling to thank her and say that it would come again the next day.

When she picked up the bowl to return it to its proper place, as Quannah had taught her to do, a beautiful fawn, with skin like brown velvet dotted with small white spots, leaped from the side of the tepee as though it were trying to frighten her. Its nose sniffed the empty bowl as it stood poised on slender legs and stretched its graceful neck. Songbird tipped the bowl. The fawn licked it perfectly clean. Then its pink tongue touched the little brown hand that held the bowl, and Songbird, looking into the beautiful dark eyes, stroked the soft nose.

The fawn waited at the entrance of the tepee until she came out. It kept pace with her to the place where Moko, the Picture-maker, lived. She was a very wonderful old squaw

with pure white hair. It was her work to paint pictures on the backs of dried buffalo robes.

One side of these robes was always covered with brown, thick hair, while the under side, dried and stretched very smoothly, had to be painted carefully with colours made from roots, berries and earths, mixed in a way that the old Picture-maker alone understood. Moko did not like any one to watch her at work, but Songbird was always welcomed. The child would sit for hours wondering at the magic way in which Moko made figures of Indians on ponies, sometimes chasing buffaloes, hunting antelope, or possibly a camp with warriors walking about the many tepees.

“Who showed you how to make pictures, Moko?” asked Songbird.

“The Great Spirit,” replied the Picture-maker, and Songbird pondered over the answer. The painting Moko was now doing was the most wonderful of all that Songbird had ever seen. The robe was the largest buffalo hide that any Comanche had ever owned. Quannah had killed the enormous beast with just one arrow, and the meat had provided food for many days. Now the hide, cured and dried, was being painted for

him, and Songbird knew that someday it would be given to her to keep.

The picture showed a lot of Indians fighting white men. The Indians could be easily told by their war-bonnets. All around the edges, the robe was bordered with the fighters, but in the very centre was an Indian boy riding a swiftly running pony. In his arms was a little girl. Songbird knew that the boy was Peta Nocona, and the girl in his arms was Preloch, the white child who had afterward been the mother of Quannah and of Prairie Flower.

“Why do the brothers of my father’s mother war with us?” she asked at last, for the question had been puzzling her a long time.

The old squaw kept on with her work, as she replied, “Because they want our lands, our ponies, our grass for their own pony herds, and they want to kill all the buffalo and antelope, so there will be none left for us. Then we could not make new tepees, nor warm robes, nor clothes, nor moccasins. Our ponies would all die if the white men had the prairie lands, and the white hunters killed the game which they did not need for food. Other Indians have told us how the white men cut the hides from buffaloes

that lie as thick as fallen leaves, and then leave the meat to spoil or for coyotes to eat. Indians hunt that they may have enough meat and robes to provide for their tribes. So it will be with the grass. The white men's herds will eat it all, leaving our ponies to starve."

"But the world is so big," Songbird spoke, "why cannot all men dwell in peace and share the game and grass?"

"Because the white people want to rule us," the Picture-maker answered quickly. "We lived here long before the white men came. We are the children of the Great Spirit. He gave us the land, He gave us the wild horses that we might tame and use them, He gave us the buffalo and deer, the antelope on the flats, the fish in the streams, that we might live happily. And because these things all belong to the Great Spirit, we did not kill more than we needed.

"The tribes did not quarrel with each other, for each had its own land and no one sought to drive them from it. Men were taught not to lie or steal, and a man who pledged his word was dishonoured if he broke it. But long years ago tales came to us through other tribes, of men with white faces who lied, stole, and cheated Indians

who had believed in them. These white-faced men killed the game, killed the Indians, burned their tepees, then came in still greater numbers and drove the Indians from place to place, saying, 'This is our land. This game belongs to us. You must not touch it!'

Moko paused and Songbird kept silent, fearing the old woman might not speak further, but at last she went on.

"When game grew scarce in the places where we had been driven, our warriors went in search of foods and robes for the old people, the squaws, and the children. White men, who saw them coming, did not ask why our men had wandered from the camps, but began to fight. After that day our warriors fought every white man they met. Each chief knew that unless he fought, his own tribe would be driven until it had no place to go, no game to eat, no robes for tepees or to sleep under when cold nights brought wind and snow, and soon all the Indians would die."

"My father's mother did not want to go away from us," said Songbird. "Many times he has told me she loved the Comanche people."

"I saw her grief"—the old Picture-maker spoke slowly, and now her wrinkled hand lay idly

in her lap—"I heard her beg the white men to leave her with us, but they would not listen to her. So Preloch, the white squaw of Peta Nona, and her baby daughter, Prairie Flower, went away and none of us ever saw them again. That is how the white men would treat all of the Indians if we did not fight them."

"My father tells me that his mother was three winters older than I am now, at the time his father carried her to our camp." Songbird leaned forward. Her body rested on the ground, but her elbow propped her cheek, so that she might still watch the work of the old Picture-maker. "Tell me about her, please."

Moko nodded, but her hand moved less swiftly as she began talking, while her eyes looked through the tepee opening across the rolling prairie, as though she saw once more the young son of the chief coming into camp with the white child in his arms.

"I can see her now as he rode past me. Her hair was like sunshine, and when the Great Spirit made openings in the sky so that we could see the stars at night, two little pieces must have been kept to make her blue eyes. As she grew up among us she was different, for she was as gentle

as a young doe. Many times she made peace between hot-blooded young warriors who wished to fight one another. The children followed her just to see her smile at them."

A deep sigh interrupted Moko's story, and for a few seconds the old woman forgot the little girl who waited patiently.

"I remember the day the white men took her away. Dark clouds gathered overhead. Peta Nocona, our chief, was dead, but he had told us to flee to our camp in the hills where the white men could not follow nor find us. As we fled, the rain fell upon us, and Karolo, the Medicine Man, called upon the Great Spirit to send the spirits of Peta Nocona and all the other Comanche warriors from the Happy Hunting Grounds, that they might follow Preloch and her daughter, Prairie Flower, into the land of the white men and bring them back again to their own people.

"The Great Spirit will send them both back some day," Karolo said as the rain beat on his face. "He is weeping now because his children are captives among the white people."

"Then we who heard him drew our robes over our faces that none but the Great Spirit might

see our grief. And for many moons the Comanches of the Quahadas kept their hair cut short because we were mourning the death of our great War Chief, Peta Nocona, and the loss of his white squaw, Preloch, with her baby daughter, Prairie Flower. Many winters have passed, but they have never come back to us."

"The snows of many winters have fallen on my head," the old Picture-maker spoke after a short silence. "I am weary and my heart is sad for my people. But I have asked the Great Spirit to let me stay until I have painted one more robe, so that you may hang it in your tepee with this one. Your children's children shall read the pictures and learn how your father, Quannah, Chief of the Quahadas, conquered the white men who robbed him of his mother and sister. After I have finished that robe, the Great Spirit will let me rest, for I am old and weary, and my children wait me in the Happy Hunting Grounds."

"I wish I could go with my father, as Preloch went with Peta Nocona," said Songbird. "I can shoot arrows as well as the boys, and Star can go as fast as Running Deer!"

"Some tribes take their squaws to help in the

fight, but Quannah will not allow it," asserted Moko. "Women and children must obey his orders and stay in camp while the men go out to fight. Our chief says that the work of women is to teach children to be fearless and truthful. That work is as great as fighting. Sometimes I think it may be greater work. Preloch said that it was better to make men love each other rather than teach them to hate and kill one another. Maybe she was right, but the white men hate us and we have to save our own lives and our homes."

Muttering to herself the old woman rose from the place where she had been sitting, and as Songbird saw the thin lips tighten, she knew that the Picture-maker would not talk any more, so she slipped away from the tent and sat watching the sun drop over the edge of the world. Two white clouds closed together, and Songbird knew that the Spirit of the Sun had dropped the flap of its tent so that it could sleep. Soon the Spirit of Night would ride his big black pony across the sky and the shadow would hide everything from sight.

Somewhere in the world of darkness Songbird's father would be sleeping. Her eyes filled

with tears and her lips trembled. She was so little, so afraid and so lonely.

In the big tepee of the Quahada Chief, Songbird crept to bed, and as she lay staring into the darkness toward her father's couch of skins, she heard the shrill yelps of coyotes gathering around the camp. Suddenly she drew the buffalo robe over her head and sobbed herself to sleep.

Chapter VI

FAR away from the camp where Song-bird waited her father's return, Star, with his mother and the other Comanche ponies, travelled rapidly, while Quannah watched the country with eyes as sharp and bright as those of an eagle.

Strange warriors from the Kiowas rode into camp on ponies which were covered with dry lather that told how far and how fast the men had ridden. At the same time Comanche messengers were being sent off on ponies, and there was a constant stir in the camp.

Star wondered about it, until he could restrain his curiosity no longer.

"Where do they go?" he questioned Running Deer, at last. His mother had been very nervous and cross, and she answered sharply:

"They go to see where the white men travel, so that Quannah may know where to find them. Be quiet, now. Watch and you will learn every-

thing for yourself. Do not talk too much, but watch and listen, then you will grow wise."

Quannah was lifting his hand, and Star's bright eyes saw one of the youngest warriors ride up to the chief.

"Let me go this time," begged the young man.

"Your pony is not swift enough," replied the chief, and the young man bowed his head in shame.

"He has but one pony," Running Deer spoke scornfully to Star. "He is poor and his mare is old. When his father went to the Happy Hunting Grounds he left but two ponies for his son, and one of them has died. His heart is brave, but his pony's legs are weak, so he will not be sent."

As Quannah began speaking, Star lifted his head quickly.

"You shall go. Running Deer is the swiftest pony of the Comanche herd, and Star, her colt, though young and untried, should be fleet-footed and sure. You shall ride him to-day."

In a few minutes the young warrior was seated on Star's bare back. Running Deer watched anxiously. But the colt's back did not weaken, nor did he flinch beneath the man's

weight. It seemed no more of a burden than when Songbird had ridden him.

“Watch out for prairie-dog holes and loose, smooth stones,” cautioned Running Deer. “When you go most swiftly, hold your nose level with your shoulders, and look straight before you without turning your head from side to side. Do not leap high, but let your body drop low to the earth when you run, and in that way you can outstrip other ponies and not weary for many long miles. If your rider falls from you, do not leave him, but stay near by until he climbs again to your back, or someone comes for you. And always remember that you belong to the Chief of the Comanches.”

While Running Deer was speaking, Quannah was talking in a low voice to the young man who sat on Star's back. As the chief's words ceased, the pony felt the rider lean forward, and his knees press closely against his sides; then, like an arrow shot from a strong bow, Star, son of Running Deer, darted on his way.

The fresh breeze swept into the pony's nostrils, it tossed his thick, black mane, and his long tail streamed like a tattered black flag, while the Comanche lying low against Star's shoulder.

seemed to be a part of the animal he was riding.

Across the wide prairie the pony raced, guided by a noose of plaited rawhide. He did not need the pressure of this rope on his neck, for the mere movement of the Indian's body was enough to tell him which way to go. No whip or blow from the rider's heels was necessary. Star understood that the chief had sent him, and the son of Running Deer must prove himself worthy of her training and his heritage.

All day they travelled. At intervals the Indian made him walk a short distance, then once more Star broke into the smooth, swift run. They passed near a band of startled antelopes which whirled and dashed away; farther off, a bunch of galloping buffaloes thudded with their heads held low down, the humps on their shoulders rising and falling like small waves of dark water, but the Indian on Star's back paid no heed to them. The quiver full of sharply pointed arrows remained slung across his back.

Just before dusk the Comanche halted among huge rocks. Slipping from the pony's back, he held his fingers tightly about Star's nose, to prevent the animal from calling out. Some distance

below them, the pony saw a great multitude of white-faced men and big ponies. The men were dressed in strange clothes instead of the robes that Indians wore. Some of them lifted things from their heads, and Star stared in surprise at the short hair. Quannah and all the Indians the pony had ever seen had worn long braids of hair called scalp-locks. It was a disgrace for a warrior to lose his scalp lock, and a great trophy of victory for any foe who cut it off. So the pony wondered why Quannah should be so grave about fighting men who had lost their scalp-locks.

As the men rode nearer, Star saw belts filled with things that gleamed, and there were long, bright sticks in their hands. The pony understood at once that these were what his mother had spoken about. Things that could roar like angry buffaloes and spit fire that killed Comanche warriors and ponies. He shivered and shrank back, but as he felt the Indian's fingers tighten, the pony remembered that Quannah had sent them here, and he must stay with his rider.

Star forgot his fears in watching the men fix many white tepees in long rows, and there were strange things that looked like long, round-topped hills of snow which moved slowly for-

ward, each dragged by six queer-looking animals. Star had never seen such strange ponies. They were all dark brown like the bark on trees, their ears were very long, their heads large, they had no flowing manes, and the only hair on their tails was in a thick bunch at the very end. While Star watched them, one of the creatures lifted up its nose and uttered a terrific noise. Instantly the others joined, and the din was so frightful that Star would have turned and raced away had not the Comanche held tightly to the pony's nose. It was the first time in his life that Star had seen white men, and he had never heard any pony speak of mules or wagons.

The young warrior crouched low. Before the noise ceased, he had led Star very cautiously until they gained a spot out of sight and hearing of the white men. Then leaping to the pony's back, the Indian raced furiously toward Quannah's camp in the sheltering hills. It was past dawn when the Comanche halted at Quannah's side. The whole camp was astir.

Other couriers had arrived from different points, on ponies streaked with dust. While the animals rubbed noses together, the messengers told Quannah what each had seen.

The man who had ridden Star was the first to speak.

“Great bands of white men are coming from all four sides of the world. The band I saw is larger than all the Kiowas and Comanches together. They are one day’s ride from here and they are travelling this way.”

“And in another place I saw a band of fighting men coming this way,” spoke a second courier.

“Still another big band comes from the opposite side,” the third man spoke.

“And back on our own trail, I saw them travelling toward us.” The last speaker was one of the head chiefs under Quannah. “I left my pony a long way off that he might not make any noise and warn the white men. Then I crawled like a snake until I reached a hill near the white tepees. I heard men’s voices but I could not understand what they said. They speak a different tongue from ours. But there were so many men and so many ponies that they were as the leaves on the trees or the blades of grass. How shall we fight them and hope to conquer?”

“They will surround us from all sides, as the hunters gather around a herd of antelopes,” one of the men said. “If they were not in back of

us, we could go to the camp where the women and children wait.”

Quannah looked at the trail which led toward his little daughter, as he said in a voice that all could hear plainly, “We will do it. I have a plan. We must protect our women and children!”

Then the Medicine Man, who had remained silent, stood beside the Comanche Chief. With hands uplifted toward the sky the old man called upon the Great Spirit to hear his children and aid them in the fight to save the game and the grass and the homes of the Comanche people from the white men who wished to destroy them.

After that Star watched the warriors hold up their long bows and quivers filled with slender arrows, that the Medicine Man’s blessing might make the arrows strong and sure, give strength to their fingers and clear vision to their eyes in the battle for their homes and those whom they loved.

Chapter VII

AMONG those who journeyed with Quannah were the youths of the Quahada Comanches who had reached the age of twelve. These boys knew how to use bows and arrows as well as the older men. Children of the tribe were given tiny bows and arrows for toys as soon as they were big enough to hold them, and each day they practised shooting at targets, while their parents watched them proudly.

They were also taught to ride a pony bareback, lying close against its neck and leaning forward, so that from the opposite side nothing could be seen of the little rider except one brown leg and a hand that clung to the pony's thick mane.

Another lesson they had to learn was to creep silently through the grass, taking great care not to make it move so that other boys could not see where they were hiding. Because of this training and their small size, some of these boys had been allowed to travel with the warriors under Quannah, that they might be used as spies when

the Indians drew near the camps of the white men.

So when the different couriers returned to Quannah and reported that the white men were coming from every side to surround the Comanches, and that part of these men were between Quannah's band and the camp where the Comanche women and children had been left, Quannah called his followers about him while the old Medicine Man stood beside the chief.

Star, who had been resting for a short time after his long trip, lifted his head curiously as he noticed the warriors gathering. Then as he saw Running Deer close to the edge of the group about Quannah, he leaped lightly to his feet and hastened to his mother's side. She rubbed her nose against his to show how pleased she was at the way he had done his part of Quannah's work. Then Quannah began speaking.

"We must go back to take care of the women and children," the chief said very plainly.

Star saw all the warriors nodding to show that they agreed with the chief, but no one spoke a word. It was so quiet that the chirp of a grasshopper close to Star's feet could be heard distinctly, and the song of a mockingbird sounded

clearly from a nearby tree. Even the big herd of twelve hundred ponies seemed to be listening for Quannah's words. There was no moving of restless hoofs, or soft sounds of grass roots being torn by grazing ponies.

Star felt a thrill of joy at what the chief said, for he knew that he would be near Songbird again. Then if the white men came, he could help her run away, as his mother had helped Quannah escape and hide. He turned to speak about this to his mother, but Running Deer shook her head quickly and he was silent. Quannah was talking

"The white men are between us and the camp where we left our women and children," he said slowly. "To the front of us are more white men. They are coming from the east and the west, also. We must make a path through them to reach our camp. The white men outnumber us many times. If we face them in open battle they will kill or take us all prisoners, then our women and children will be helpless."

"Our chief speaks the truth," the Medicine Man spoke, and the others grunted and nodded at one another to show that he was right.

"To-day," Quannah went on, "we must ride

hard until we are near the white men, then we will halt and hide. It is the dark of the moon now, and when the sun has gone, I shall send the smallest boys on our swiftest ponies to stampede the ponies of the white men. While all is confusion in their camp, we can dash past them in the dark, taking their ponies with us as we go on our way. Without ponies how can they catch us?"

All the warriors showed their satisfaction in the words and looks that Star and Running Deer understood plainly. In a short time the Indians were riding the trail that led directly back toward the camp of the squaws and children and old, weak men who could not fight.

During the day messengers were sent ahead, and Star kept close beside his mother on whom Quannah was riding. When the couriers returned late in the afternoon, Star and Running Deer listened intently to their words.

"The white men are moving toward us," spoke one man who had ridden away that morning. His tired pony stood with low-hanging head while its drawn sides and quick breathing told how hard the pace had been. "When the sun goes to sleep for the night, they will be not more than two hours from here."

“They have big white ponies,” another messenger said. “Last night I lay so close to their camp that I could hear voices in the strange white tepees. A few men who do not sleep walk around and keep watch. All of the men have fire-sticks. The ponies are unsaddled and each one is tied to a long rope, so they make a line, side by side!”

“That is good!” Quannah’s eyes brightened.

Turning to the Medicine Man he spoke in a low voice, so that neither Star nor Running Deer was able to hear what he said. The other Comanches began making preparations for food, so Running Deer, with Star at her side, moved slowly away, cropping the thick, tender grass as they talked together.

“Mother, do you think we will be sent to-night?” Star asked suddenly.

“Maybe,” she answered. “I am the swiftest pony of the herd, and you have proved your speed and strength to-day. It would be a great honour if both of us were sent. But now stop talking. Eat, that you may rest, for no one can tell when we may be needed, nor how long and hard the trail before we can graze and rest again.”

Star obeyed. After he had eaten his fill of juicy grass he wandered with his mother to a stream where they thrust their noses into the clear, cool water and drank all they wished. Then the two of them found a spot which they pawed to make more soft, and doubling their front knees they sank slowly to the ground and soon lay sleeping side by side.

Several hours had passed when Star wakened suddenly at a whisper from his mother, whose lips touched one of his ears. It was quite dark, but the stars gleamed overhead. When the little spots of light flickered in the sky Star knew that it was from the hoofs of ponies in the Happy Hunting Grounds just as the Comanche ponies made sparks of fire when rocks were tossed together violently by the ponies' flying hoofs.

"Listen!" whispered Running Deer. "The men are picking the ponies for to-night's work!"

The colt's body quivered with excitement, his lips twitched and his ears cocked sharply, while his eyes peered into the darkness where he could hear the soft tread of moccasined feet that were coming nearer and nearer to him and his mother. He wanted to leap up and call out to the war-

riors that he was awake and ready, but a nudge from his mother made him lie down quietly and wait.

In a few seconds an indistinct figure stood beside him. A hand touched his forelock. Star rose quickly to his feet as a rawhide noose slipped about his neck. He felt his mother's nose against his own, but the nip she gave him this time was not an angry one. It told him as plainly as she could speak how proud she was that her son had been picked out for the work.

"Do your best," he heard her say. "Remember, you are my colt. Your honour is my honour. If you fail it is my disgrace as well as yours!"

Then he was led away, leaving his mother watching him as he disappeared in the darkness of night. She knew that the quick little bite he had given her was a promise that he would not forget all she had taught him.

The man whom Star followed stopped where Quannah and all the warriors stood with two little Comanche boys, who were looking up at the chief and listening carefully to every word he was speaking to them. Star was close enough to hear what was said.

"Ride swiftly," Quannah commanded. "Make

no noise. When you are near the white men's camp lie closely and hold your hands tightly across your ponies' noses to keep them from calling out to the white men's ponies and warning them of danger."

"We will do as you say," the boys promised sturdily.

"Good!" the chief answered. "Leave your ponies while you crawl cautiously to the rope that holds the white men's ponies. Cut the rope and leap on the nearest pony, then shout loudly and beat the ponies with the pieces of buffalo hide you carry. That will frighten them so they will run away. Your own ponies will follow. You must drive the white men's ponies toward the place where we will be waiting to help you. Thus we will capture the white men's ponies, so the men cannot follow us to our women and children."

"We understand," replied the boys in one voice, while the Indians watched them and whispered to one another, "These children will be great warriors when they are full-grown men!"

Once again Quannah spoke to the boys. "The honour of the Quahada Comanches is in your

hands. Guard it with your lives. If you are captured, let no man know why you were sent, nor where we are waiting. Do not whisper it even between your two selves, for the wind might steal your words and carry them to the white men's ears."

Then the old Medicine Man stepped before the two children, and his thin arms and trembling hands were extended over their heads. The boys knelt down. Around them like shadows in the faint starlight stood all the Quahada Comanche warriors, and their chief watched the two slender lads, his eyes full of pride.

"Great Spirit, hear the cry of your children. Help us save the game and the grass that we may live in peace and happiness in the land you gave to our fathers long ago. Send their spirits from the Happy Hunting Grounds this night that they may travel beside these children and give them courage and cunning to save the Comanche people. We are weak, we are few, and the white men are many and strong. We must go out to fight and we ask the Great Spirit to help us, for with the Great Spirit and the spirits of our forefathers we shall win over all our foes!"

In the silence that followed the Medicine Man's blessing, the boys rose to their feet. Then Star shivered with excitement as one of the boys grasped the mane that fell thickly on the pony's neck. With a quick, light bound the lad vaulted to Star's bare back. Beside them the other boy was astride a pony named Hawk.

Silently the circle of warriors parted so that there was a space. The young riders leaned down on the necks of the ponies and darted, side by side, through the pathway of Comanches, then on through darkness that wrapped the prairie like a heavy black cloak.

Chapter VIII

STAR and Hawk kept a steady pace for more than an hour. Neither of the boys had spoken a word during that time, then Star's rider whispered softly—"Sh——" like the hiss of a snake in the grass, or the noise of wind through the leaves.

Small, strong hands reached from either side of Star's neck, and fingers were pressed firmly on his nostrils. The pressure did not interfere with the pony's breathing, but so long as it continued Star knew that it would be impossible for him to whinny. His rider did not know that the pony understood the reason and the importance of being quiet.

Faintly the sound of stamping, restless hoofs came to Star's ears, and told him that strange ponies were near. His nose touched Hawk's neck, and the other pony signalled an answer. Star and Hawk had been friends and playmates ever since they had been born. Hawk was two days older than Star, but Star had always been

more swift when they had chased each other about the Comanche camp in play. Hawk belonged to a young warrior who had not many ponies, so, long before Star had been fully grown, Hawk had been carrying his owner. The work had made the muscles of his back and legs very strong for so young a pony.

The two boys now released their grip on the ponies' noses and slid cautiously down. Star watched them lying flat and crawling slowly in the direction from which the noise of ponies could be heard. Hawk and Star, with noses together, waited patiently.

For a long time everything was silent, then shrill yells caused the two ponies to jump nervously. They heard snorting of ponies and trampling of hoofs, and men's voices were calling loudly in words that were not like the Comanche tongue. Star reared and plunged against a small rope of buffalo hide by which he was fastened to a scrubby tree. Hawk, also tied, was lunging and kicking.

Then something terrible happened. Frightful noises, like cracking of thunder, seemed everywhere. Lightning flashed close to the ground. It did not come from the sky, like other lightning

when it stormed. Star crouched and trembled in fear of the thing he could not understand, but Hawk with a still greater effort broke loose.

"Come!" he called to Star, turning to run from the noise that was deafening. "Come quickly! It is the fire-stick that kills Comanches and their ponies. Run! Run! Run!"

He did not wait while Star fought and struggled against the stout rawhide rope which held him fast. Fire leaped from darkness and noises grew louder. Then the thud of racing ponies grew more distinct and in the dim light Star saw a vast herd of pure white ponies rush past him and vanish like snowflakes blown by a strong wind.

But the flashes of fire did not cease, and the pony threw his whole weight against the rope. It broke and he was free. With a shrill squeal Star followed the fleeing animals. Though they had passed him so quickly he had seen two small dark forms on white ponies at the end of the herd. They were ahead of him now, and Star redoubled his efforts until he came abreast of Hawk. Together they raced, but slowly and surely Star passed him.

Like a thin cloud the white ponies kept ahead

of Star. His ears cocked sharply, his nose was thrust far out and level with his shoulders, his eyes peered into the gloom to gauge the distance and make his own pace, his body flattened more closely to the ground, and the steady stride of his slender legs never wavered, while his mane tossed wildly and his long black tail fluttered in the air that he cut in his wild race.

He reached the fear-crazed white animals, and edging his way between them, Star found the boy who had ridden him now seated astride one of the largest white ponies. Star looked at it as he ran beside it. He had never seen such a big pony in all his life. But the Comanche pony saw that the white pony was breathing very hard, while its legs moved uncertainly and heavily as it ran.

“It is a big pony,” Star said to himself, “but I can out-run it without trouble. Buffaloes are big and heavy. They can run fast, too. But an antelope or deer is more swift. I can out-race an antelope. So can my mother!”

He tossed his saucy head and slyly poked the big white pony in the ribs, to make it go faster. But the poor beast was doing its very best, and it rolled its eyes toward Star.

"Please don't bite me," it spoke. "I am too old and too fat to run so fast and so far!"

"I won't hurt you," replied the Comanche pony, crowding more closely.

The Indian boy on the white pony's back saw Star, and twisting sidewise, the lad gathered himself, leaped from the horse he was riding and landed firmly on the back of the Comanche pony.

The boy's shout of triumph mingled with Star's squeal of delight as out of the darkness rode Quannah on Running Deer, while back of the chief dashed the rest of the warriors.

Circling about the white horses the Comanches urged them rapidly over the low rolling hills until they were completely hidden in thick undergrowth, where they halted.

The white horses showed plainly how hard the pace had been, for they stood with heads hanging low, their sides drawn and nostrils dilating rapidly. Many of them lost no time in lying down where they stood, without even seeking a comfortable soft spot.

"They tire easily," Star said to his mother who was near him. "Hawk and I could have left them far behind and it would not have made us

puff like these white ponies. They must belong to squaws and children. They are too fat and too slow for fighting men."

"No herd can run as fast as the ponies of the Quahadas," replied his mother. "Come, lie down and rest while there is time. When we are out with the warriors it is our duty to rest and feed whenever we have time, for when we travel we cannot tell when we will stop. Only Quannah knows that."

Star glanced at the warriors who sat on the ground and talked together, while still others, on their ponies, guarded the captured white animals. Two days and a night of fast travelling made Star feel that he had earned a good rest, so he slipped to the ground and soon was fast asleep.

But in his dream he was racing again. This time he was trying to reach Songbird who was calling to him that the white men were taking her away, as they had taken Quannah's mother and sister, so that she could never come back again to her people. He was running faster than any Comanche pony had ever run before—twice as fast as Running Deer could run, for he thought she was trying now to keep pace with him and

was falling behind. Only the storm wind could travel that fast. Star found that no matter how swiftly he raced Songbird was always beyond him. He could not see her, but her voice came back to him.

“I am coming,” he whinnied shrilly.

Her voice grew more faint and at last it ceased altogether while he whinnied despairingly, hoping to hear her answer.

Then he felt his mother touch him, and opened his eyes to see her lying beside him.

“What is the matter?” she asked. “You are kicking so that you wakened me.”

He told her the dream and she listened gravely, though she answered carelessly, “You are over-tired. After all, you are but a colt and your muscles are soft. You have been tested as few colts are tested at your age. Go to sleep again, so that you will be ready to travel with us, for last night I heard Quannah say that as soon as the big white ponies have rested, we would start for the camp of the women and children. Now that we have captured the white men’s ponies they cannot catch us. That is why we are to rest for to-day.”

When it was time to get up, Star felt as well

as though he had never raced, but the big white ponies were still weary. Some of them did not rise. Many others moved stiffly as they mingled with the Comanche herd while they cropped the grass together like old friends.

Most of the warriors had gone across a small ridge into a gully or ravine, where they made a camp. This was done so that the smoke from their camp fire might not be seen from afar, and thus tell the white men where to hunt their lost ponies. Only dry wood was used for the camp fire. Wood fresh or green would have made too much smoke. A few warriors were left to guard the herd, for the Comanche ponies were trained to keep together, while the white ponies were too tired to run away, even if given a chance to escape.

Star wandered near the white horse that had begged him not to bite it because it was too old and too fat to run so fast. With raised head and a bunch of grass hanging from its lips, it looked curiously at the Comanche pony. Slowly its eyes travelled from Star's velvety nose, along his straight back, his slender legs and strongly muscled flanks to the sweeping black tail that almost touched the ground. The white

horse swallowed the clump of grass before it spoke.

“You are a beautiful horse!”

“I am not a horse,” Star answered indignantly, “I am a Comanche pony. What is a horse, anyway?”

“A horse is a big pony,” replied the other. “I am a horse. We cannot run as swiftly as you ponies, but we are stronger to haul burdens when we are hitched to wagons by our masters.”

Star was so surprised that he stopped grazing to talk with the good-natured white beast; and it told him there were thousands of men with white faces, who carried guns and lived in houses made of rocks instead of tepees of hides. He told how these men fed corn and hay to their horses, as well as grass. Then he explained how some horses were taught to be gentle, so that saddles were placed on their backs and bits in their mouths; other horses learned to drag carriages in which women and children rode safely, and still other horses hauled heavier wagons loaded with blankets and food.

“They even build houses for us,” he continued, “and when it storms we are warm and dry and

have nothing to do but chew our grain. If we have to go out in a rain, when we come back we are rubbed dry and a warm blanket covers us to our heels so that we may not be chilled. But sometimes white men are cruel to us," he added.

"I hate men with white faces," snorted Star, stamping his forefoot angrily. "My mother says that they will take our game and our grass and kill all the Comanche ponies and people. The white men took Quannah's mother and sister away and they never came back to us. That is why I hate men with white faces!"

"Not all of them are that way," the big horse said earnestly. "Many white people do not wish to fight. Sometimes Indians have killed white women and children and have burned their homes, or taken them prisoners. Then the Great Father of the whole world, who is over the white people and the Indians, too, has to send soldiers to find the white prisoners and make the Indians keep away from the homes of the white men."

Star thought over these words before he asked, "Who told you all this?"

"I learned it myself, through many years of hard work," was the reply. "Ever since I was five years old I have belonged to the White

Horse Troop which was captured by the Indians last night. Only white horses are in that troop, but in other troops there are blacks and bays and sorrels. Each of the troops has three officers and the captain is in command while the others are under him. So for many years I have gone with the troop over miles of rough country, sometimes swimming great rivers, and often we encountered big bands of Indians who fought us. Maybe the Indians are wrong, maybe it is the white man, but men are our masters and so, right or wrong, we obey them and love them. Yet we horses do not understand, nor do we fight the Indian ponies. I am old and I do not wish to fight any one. But we must obey our masters. When I was young I did not ask questions, but now that I am stiff from years, I wonder why people fight one another."

"Do all your horses fight?" was Star's puzzled comment.

"Not the band horses," replied the white horse. "They do not go out of the garrison where we all live together. Their riders have shining horns and big drums that make such beautiful music that when we troop horses come out on parade, we cannot keep our feet from dancing or

our necks from curving with pride. The Band horses are very proud and keep to themselves when we are all out grazing, and of course, no one could blame them for that.”

Star listened in amazement. He was anxious to learn all that he could, so as to repeat this wonderful story to his mother.

“You use so many strange words,” he said at last. “What is a parade?”

“Why, just a big green piece of ground, but all around it are buildings where officers and soldiers live. In the centre of each parade is a very high white pole. On top of it floats a beautiful flag.”

“What is that?” interrupted Star, bewildered.

“It is like a big blanket made of fine cloth. There are stripes of white and red and in one corner is a patch of blue with white stars on it.”

“I know what a star is,” said the Comanche pony. “My name is Star because I have the white mark on my forehead. Songbird, the little daughter of Chief Quannah, gave me that name when I was too small and too weak to stand up on my legs. I belong to Songbird, and my mother, Running Deer, is the favourite pony of the chief,” he ended proudly.

"I saw her talking to you," was the answer, "and I thought how beautiful she was!"

Star edged more closely to his new acquaintance. "Even though our masters fight, I like you and we will be friends," he said, rubbing his nose against the white horse's neck, then letting his neck rest across the troop horse's back, Star bit gently, while the big horses did the same to him. Only horses who are fond of one another give this pledge of friendship.

"I wish our masters would be friends, too," said the old troop horse at last. "If every one would be friends there would be no more fighting."

"There is enough grass and room for all the tepees, so maybe they will stop fighting soon," Star spoke hopefully.

"Some horses kick and bite and steal grain from the others," the white horse answered, "and when one horse in a team kicks, balks, or will not pull its share of the load, the other horses must do it all. White men, Indians, and horses are all the same. Some are good, some are bad, but the burdens of those who are bad must be carried by those who try to do right. I am the oldest of those in the White Horse Troop and

I speak of things I have seen in many long years. I am sorry for the horse that kicks and bites and steals, but I do not hate him. The whip is made to punish him, and some day he will suffer."

The day passed quickly for the troop horse and the Comanche pony. When the shadows of the trees disappeared because the sun was straight above the camp, the troop horse stretched out for a noonday sleep, and Star's black head rested on the white horse's neck.

Running Deer, searching for her colt, found them together and she lay down beside them.

Chapter IX

TWO hours before sunset Star awakened from his sound sleep, but the white horse only lifted its head long enough to blink at the Comanche pony as it rolled over. Then Star scrambled to his feet and gave a hard shake of his body, which is the way a pony stretches after a good nap.

Running Deer was not far off, so the colt joined her, and after an exchange of gentle bites, they moved slowly away from the herd, grazing as they went. Star told his mother all that the troop horse had been talking about, and Running Deer was as much surprised as her colt had been, for she had no idea of how white men lived.

The two Comanche ponies were so interested in their conversation that neither of them noticed they had wandered quite a distance from the herd. The Indians on guard over the other ponies had not tried to stop Star or Running Deer, because all the Comanches knew that neither of these ponies would stray far away.

But the rolling hills stretched temptingly, and at times Star and his mother raced after each other, kicking up their heels or even lying down to roll and kick, then jumping up to dash away side by side. When the sun dropped out of the sky Running Deer was startled, and reminded her colt that they must go back at once.

They were standing on a little knoll overlooking a shallow depression between a group of small hills. The sun had disappeared, but like a warrior's banner beautiful crimson rays were flung across the deep blue sky. The cool evening breeze twisted its fingers in the ponies' manes, lifting the heavy black hair and tumbling it across their eyes, so that it tickled their ears until Star tossed his head. The only sound was the song of a mockingbird guarding the nest on which its mate sat patiently with her wings spread over the little ones that the night air might not chill them. The grassy slopes were studded with wild flowers, many of which, sleepy from their long day's play with the breeze, nodded on their stems with their petals folded as though their hands were clasped in prayer.

Here and there jack-rabbits, their long ears perked nervously, twisted to see if any danger

threatened, then dropping on all four feet they hopped, and chased one another in play, or nibbled at the grass roots. An antelope with her fawn at her side appeared for an instant on one of the hilltops, her head lifted alertly, her nostrils twitching as she sniffed the air. She started, whirled on her slender legs, then with her fawn dashed out of sight.

Running Deer watched her go, but Star spoke and she looked at him.

“Now that we have the ponies of the white men, they cannot follow us any more,” he was saying. “But I like the old white horse, and I am glad that he is going to stay with us. He is a very wise animal, I think, and I am going to ask him to tell me all he knows, then I shall be wise, too!”

Before his mother could reply, the sharp “Yip, yip, yip” from a distant point warned the two ponies that the coyotes were gathering for the night. Both Star and Running Deer snorted and glanced quickly about, to see if any had crept too near.

They knew the ways of the small gray wolves. Each night at sunset the pack followed its leader to a point where he could command a view for

some distance. Then he squatted silently, watching everything with his keen, green eyes while his pointed nose sniffed the wind for hidden foes or some animal that would furnish the pack with food.

So long as the wind came toward him from any living thing, he could escape, but when the wind blew away from him toward another animal or a man, the coyote knew that he was not safe from surprise or attack.

Trained from puppyhood by their mothers how to meet their enemies and preserve their own lives, the coyotes always picked the strongest, swiftest, and most daring of a pack for the leader. At nightfall these leaders raced ahead of their packs across the prairie land, and when one leader reached high ground he squatted down on his lean haunches and sent out the call of his tribe.

Before the echo had died away into silence, another leader gave answer. After that other coyotes took up the cry, and then from all sides the packs swept down the slopes and came together in a big gray mass.

Their long tongues lolled from their mouths as they ran, their green eyes glanced ravenously

from side to side. Rabbits and other small game, hearing the cry of the pack, scurried into hiding. Antelopes and deer huddled more closely, keeping the young, weak fawns in the centre. Often the hungry coyotes formed yelping circles about the antelopes, and at times made dashes at them, hoping to frighten some fawn so that it would run alone. For if it left the shelter of the herd only half a minute, the coyotes would leap upon it and tear it to pieces.

The does and the stags of the herd knew the danger. So while the mothers' bodies sheltered their little ones, the stags, with long, many-pronged horns, dashed at the coyotes and, if close enough, tossed or gored their foes, often rearing straight up on their hind legs to stamp on the coyotes with sharply pointed little hoofs that cut like keen knives.

With all other animals of the plains, the Comanche ponies knew that if any colt ever strayed alone from the herd, he might fall a victim to the coyote packs. Even buffalo calves had been dragged down by a bunch of the prowling animals. Star's mother had many times shown him torn bits of buffalo hide and scattered bones which told that the pack had found a buffalo

calf unprotected. Hundreds of coyotes gather in each band, and swift as the wind, they cover many miles in search of a victim.

Now, as the first call of the gathering coyotes died away, Running Deer spoke hurriedly to Star, who needed no urging. Turning sharply on their hind hoofs, they started on a swift run toward the place where all the other ponies were being herded.

It was much farther than Running Deer or Star had thought. The coyotes were not far behind. The sound of the pack grew louder, and the gray brutes came over the hill yelping with glee as they saw the two ponies. Running Deer kept talking quietly to her colt as they ran.

“Don’t jump high, run low and save yourself all you can,” she said, her nose near Star’s, but her eyes straight ahead of her. “They run fast to-night because they have not eaten nor found water. So we must be careful.”

It was the first time that Star had been chased by coyotes. He knew that his mother had been followed many times, so he listened to every word and obeyed her. Both ponies were puffing slightly, but their pace did not change though their way often led up steep slopes then down

opposite banks while their forefeet ploughed deeply into the earth.

“Don’t slip,” warned Running Deer as they raced neck and neck. “The coyotes cannot catch either of us unless we stumble. If I should fall, you must not stop, but go right on to camp.”

Star did not answer. He knew that if his mother fell, he would stay with her and fight the coyotes with his teeth and his heels so the hungry beasts could not tear her to pieces before she could get up again and run with him.

Twice he slipped on loose stones that rolled down the slopes in front of him, and once he fell and skinned his knees, but he leaped to his feet and kept at his mother’s side.

At times the pack behind them ran silently, then Running Deer’s eyes rolled backward to see how near they were. Star wondered how it would feel to have a coyote leap on him. He shivered, but all his fears vanished at his mother’s next words.

“They are falling back now! We are gaining at every step!”

He glanced around. She was right. The coyotes were farther away, and evidently real-

ized that the ponies had outdistanced them, for they were all running much more slowly. A few had halted and showed plainly that they intended to look elsewhere for their dinner that night. One by one the pack thinned, and finally a mournful howl told that the last pursuer had given up the chase, leaving Star and his mother alone and safe.

“When you fell to your knees”—Running Deer was walking now, and her nose reached across to Star’s—“I thought we two had run our last race. They were very close just then.”

“But you could have escaped,” replied Star, whose bleeding knees made him wish he could stand in cool water for a little while, and he thought happily of the creek near camp.

“I would have stayed with you,” his mother said quietly. Star was not surprised at her words, for he knew that he would have done the same thing for her, but he was glad it had not been necessary for either of them to make such a fight against their foes. With several hundred hungry coyotes against them, how could two ponies have kept up the fight till dawn? That was what he asked himself, and Running Deer had the same thought, though neither spoke of it.

In a few more minutes they both recognized the top of an elevation that overlooked the grazing place and safety for the night. Star, because of his raw knees, lagged slightly behind his mother, and as she stopped suddenly he hastened to her side, where both of them stared in amazement.

"I thought we had reached the herd." Star was the first to speak as they looked down on a place where no pony was in sight.

"It is where we left the herd," she answered. "They have moved it to Quannah's camp. Come! We must hurry. They must have missed us by this time. Quannah will be angry with the herders and punish them for letting us get away."

Without going down into the former herding camp, Running Deer led her colt along the top of the ridge, knowing that it would take them just above Quannah's camp, about a mile farther on. Star understood her worry, or at least he thought he did; but he wondered at her nervous starts and snorts, for there was nothing that threatened either of them now. Coyotes sometimes ventured close to the camps, but they only squatted at the outer edge and Star knew that they would keep away from any camp fire, lurk-

ing in the shadows to avoid being seen or shot at by the Comanches guarding the herd.

Though it was now more than an hour after sunset, it was still quite light when Star caught the scent of the pony herd and knew they were close by. But he jumped back snorting as he saw his mother, who had reached a higher point of ground, rear suddenly and turn.

“Run! Run! Run as fast as you can! The white men have all our ponies! They have captured the herders, too! Quannah is over the hill. We must go to him! He may need us now!”

Before they could cover the ground between the captured ponies and Quannah’s camp, almost a mile away, they heard the terrible noise of fire-sticks. It came from the direction of Quannah’s camp. The white men were there, too!

Star and his mother stopped instantly and looked at each other. Both trembled with fear of the fire-sticks. They knew what those things meant.

“What shall we do?” the colt asked in fright.

“I belong to Quannah,” his mother spoke. “I shall follow him wherever he goes. You belong to Songbird. You must go to her and

help her escape the white men, so that they may not take her away as they took Quannah's mother and sister. Go back to the camp and find Songbird!"

The colt hesitated. He had never been anywhere by himself. Always the pony herd and his mother had been with him, except for the few hours when Songbird had ridden him near the big camp. He thought of the packs of coyotes and the long, lonesome miles that he must travel to reach the camp where the women and children waited the return of Quannah and his warriors who were now fighting the white men and the fire-sticks. Star knew they were fighting, for the noise hurt his ears as he stood facing his mother.

She heard it too. Her ears went flat back against her beautiful head, her nostrils were drawn in so that her nose looked thin, and little red sparks of anger glittered in her dark eyes. Then she said in a voice that made Star shrink back ashamed of himself.

"Is the big colt of Running Deer a coward? Go! I tell you go at once! You belong to Songbird! She needs you now!"

Running Deer's strong teeth caught Star's

back and sank deeply into the soft flesh. With a squeal of pain and surprise, the colt leaped away. Forgetting the coyotes and the loneliness of the trail and with no further thought of his cut knees, he raced furiously into the gathering darkness of night to find his little mistress, who had no one but himself to help her, now that Quannah was unable to reach her.

Chapter X

STAR had no trouble following the dim trail of the Comanche ponies back toward their camp. Though he had travelled it only once he did not forget it, and what was still more strange, he, like other ponies raised on the prairies and in the mountains, was able to go over dangerous places in the dark.

The only thing that really bothered him was that the coyotes were near him at night when he could not see them. But he slept in the daytime, taking short naps, or just rested with his eyes wide open; then when darkness fell, he rose and went steadily on.

Of course, he worried about his mother, wondering where she was and what had happened to Quannah and the warriors and all the Comanche ponies. If Star had not seen his mother's fright and had not heard the fire-sticks talking so angrily, he would have thought it a great lark to be alone, with no one to control him.

More than once he was tempted to go back

to his mother, but when he hesitated he remembered that she probably was no longer in the place he had left her; besides, he dared not risk her anger by disobeying her. Her teeth were sharp and her jaws strong, and his back still hurt where she had bitten him. She had often pinched him, but never before had Running Deer hurt her colt. It was not actually the bite that hurt most, but what she had said when she thought he was a coward. So Star decided he had better go on, and he trotted or loped toward the camp where Songbird had remained with the women and children.

The coyotes, though following, kept a respectful distance from his teeth and heels. Several times they tumbled over each other in their haste to dodge him when, with a squeal of fury, he raced after them. He knew that they could not catch him as long as he was awake and could see them, and his hearing was so keen that even the crackling of a dry twig awoke him and brought him with a bound to his feet ready to meet his foes.

There were many little streams of clear water and plenty of good feed, and Star would have been quite happy had he not been anxious about

his mother, Quannah, and the Comanche pony herd. Songbird, he believed quite safe in the camp with the women, papooses, and old men who had been too aged or feeble to join the warriors in the fight.

It took a week for Star to reach the top of a gentle slope from which he looked down upon the camp. Smoke was rising lazily from fires in the tepees, children were playing in front of their homes, and the squaws were moving about attending to their everyday work. But as the pony looked, it seemed strange not to see even one animal of the immense Comanche pony herd.

“Suppose I should never see them again!” he thought for the first time. “Maybe the white men will take my mother away, too!”

Unable to resist his feeling of loneliness and fear, Star lifted his head and called loudly, though he knew perfectly well that all the ponies were with Quannah, and that it had taken a journey of one week to get to this camp. Of course he did not expect an answer, but he gave call after call. Even the sound of his own voice made it seem less lonesome just now.

A squaw, carrying a bundle of dry faggots

on her bent back, was the first to hear him, and after the first glance her cry of surprise brought other women from the tepees. Someone called to Songbird, and as the child ran out of her father's big tepee, Star gave a shrill nicker and raced pell-mell down the slope until he gained her side. Songbird's arms wound around his neck, and his head bent low, while he listened to the loving words of his little mistress and felt her soft hands caress him.

The other children gathered, while the squaws talked among themselves, each one trying to understand how Star had come alone to the camp. Many of them were certain that Quannah and his warriors were returning, and that Star had just galloped ahead to find Songbird.

They hastened to assure the child that this was the only solution to the puzzle, and so they left Songbird and Star and hastened to make preparations for the returning warriors, who would be very hungry and tired after so long a journey.

Star followed Songbird when she climbed the hill, where they watched together while below them the other children and all the women rushed about preparing a great feast. But the hours

passed, and when it was too dark to see anything except the flickering fires and the shadowy figures near the light, Songbird and Star moved slowly down the hillside. The pony's head drooped, for he was very tired, and Songbird's cheeks were streaked where she had wiped away tears that she must not allow any one except Star to see, for she was the daughter of the chief. Moko gave a sharp glance at Songbird, then spoke in a low voice.

"Quannah will come, and I shall paint a robe for him, and it will show how he conquered the white men, and I shall paint Songbird, the daughter of Quannah, and Star, the colt of Running Deer, waiting for the return of Quannah and his warriors."

Songbird looked soberly at Moko. "What will you paint if my father does not come back again, Moko?"

"I will paint a chief's daughter who did not cry," the old woman answered. "Men fight with spears and arrows or knives, and they win honour and praise, but women fight alone and no one knows when they fight. Brave women do not weep. You are the daughter of the chief. His mother rode beside his father when the fire-sticks

screamed at them, and she was not afraid. You will not cry even though Quannah does not return to us."

"No"—the voice that answered Moko was very low and trembling—"I will not cry, Moko."

The old Picture-Maker, clutching a lock of Star's mane in her wrinkled hand, looked after the little figure that walked proudly away and disappeared into the chief's tent. Moko shook her white head sadly as she gave some dried corn to Star, then tethered him with a long rope made from plaited strips of buffalo hide. In the big tepee Songbird lay across the bed of furs, choking back sobs that must not be heard.

During the following week the squaws and children watched, while Songbird and Star went daily to the highest point overlooking the camp, hoping for some sign of the returning warriors. As the two were about to start up the hill on the morning of the eighth day, a Comanche warrior, mounted on a black pony, appeared on the point above the camp. Star was the first to see him. Star knew that black pony had sharp teeth and very strong jaws. Running Deer answered her colt's welcoming call, then Star tore madly toward his mother, who, with

Quannah on her back, scrambled hastily to meet her colt.

As the ponies met, Songbird held out her arms, and her father lifted her from Star's back. Holding her before him, the chief rode down into the camp, while Songbird's eyes glowed with pride and joy. Star, keeping closely beside his mother, kicked his heels, shook his head, and nipped his mother's neck.

Over the crest of the hill behind Quannah, rode the cavalcade of Comanche warriors. Their war-bonnets trailed over their shoulders and fell almost to the ground, their shields were held aloft, and the silver trinkets on each pony jingled loudly. One by one the Comanches dashed furiously into the camp, formed in single files and raced in and out between the tepees, uttering shrill cries of triumph, while the women and even tiny children joined in the song of victory.

Songbird had been dropped lightly to the ground, and now, among the other children, she watched her father as he sat on Running Deer towering above all the other warriors. Her little heart seemed ready to burst with pride. Never had there been such a Comanche Chief, she thought.

The war-bonnet of eagle feathers which encircled his forehead swept down his back, and over Running Deer's glossy black flank to the mare's fetlocks. Large hoops of brass were in the chief's ears, and a necklace of bear's claws hung about his neck. Quannah had killed those bears, and each one had been big and very fierce. Only a brave warrior could have killed them alone. Tight trousers of buckskin, fringed at the outer seams, and moccasins trimmed with bits of red cloth, finished the best clothes of a Comanche chief. Songbird thought it a beautiful way of dressing.

His hair, braided with otter fur and tied with strips of red material, formed a long scalp-lock. It was a disgrace for a warrior to have no scalp-lock. In battle his enemies always tried to capture it as a trophy of victory and proof of bravery.

Many of the ponies were striped with different colours. The stripes were used on buckskin, white, gray, or sorrel ponies to prevent detection by foes, but the darker ponies, such as blacks or bays, did not need such precautions. Running Deer, being coal-black like Star, had not been painted. The mare's bridle was heavy with sil-

ver ornaments which had been hammered firmly on reins and headstall, while her long tail and thick mane were braided with the same kind of red cloth that tied Quannah's scalp-lock.

An hour after the return of the men, the ponies had been unsaddled and turned loose to rest and graze, while their owners scattered in the village to prepare for the feast that awaited them, and to relate to the eager squaws and papooses how their chief had outwitted and evaded the white men who had hoped to capture the Comanches. For Quannah had lured them over misleading trails, up and down steep cañons, out on the border of the sandy desert called the Staked Plains, where white men, unable to find water or food, lay down to die, but where the Comanche Indians travelled without disaster.

The boys who had sneaked into the picket-lines of the soldiers and had then stampeded the white horses were praised and feasted by the squaws, envied by all the other boys, and smiled at by the girls who watched the little heroes admiringly.

The next day the camp was bustling with activity before the sun peered curiously over the hill tops. That night the warriors were to cele-

brate the Pipe Dance, and when the full moon rose over the distant mountains all of the Quahadas gathered for the ceremony.

Songbird was dressed in her new buckskin robe, her hair was smoothly braided and fell in two long plaits. She walked proudly, for no other child was to have the honour of standing with the squaws in the Dance. Already a ring was forming. In the very centre were the women, whom Songbird joined, and with the women stood a few of the very old men. Beyond them was a still larger circle composed of the warriors, including Gray Beard, Big Wolf, and Spotted Leopard.

Karolo, the Medicine Man, stood beside Quannah, who held a lighted pipe made of red sandstone. At a signal the warriors began dancing slowly about their chief, all moving in the same direction, like a revolving wheel. As each man came opposite Quannah, the chief held out the smoking pipe and the warrior who received it took a whiff or two; then, handing it back to Quannah, the man kept on dancing, all the while the others went on with their weird chant.

Star and Running Deer stood together on the outer edge watching the dancers, who finished

with great whoops of excitement. Then men, women, and children squatted near the big camp fire where a feast had been set. The light of the moon made each face as distinct as though it were being seen in early morning. Beyond the edge of the camp, coyotes gathered, sniffing the air and yelping because they dared not come nearer the food that smelled so good.

It was a night to be long remembered by the Quahada Comanches, but at last the men, women, and sleepy children rose and went to their homes, where, with a few parting words to one another, they lifted the flaps of their tepees and slipped through the entrances. In a short time even their murmuring voices were silent.

The moon continued slowly on its journey through the sky, and the pony herd huddled together for the rest of the night. Among the sleeping animals was the old white troop horse, and Star, with Running Deer, stretched closely beside him. They had all been very glad to meet again.

Star had noticed another strange horse not far away. He was a big, gray animal. Just now he was moving nervously and lifting his head, looked about him. Star's eyes met those of the stranger.

For a second the two horses stared curiously at each other. Then the gray horse let his head fall slowly to the ground. Star, too sleepy to think of anything but rest, closed his eyes and pillowed his head comfortably on his mother's neck. She blinked at him, but the bite she gave his neck did not hurt this time. Then they all slept.

None of them ever stirred when the Comanche on guard over the pony herd, seeing a coyote sneaking too near, seized a burning brand from the smouldering camp fire and tossed it at the shadowy, skulking form. Countless little sparks scattered as the burning stick hit the ground, and the cry of the coyote pack grew fainter and fainter, until it died in the distance.

Chapter XI

THE next morning when Star, with his mother and the Old White Horse, had found a nice place to graze near the other ponies, the Big Gray Horse that Star had noticed the previous night joined them, and the Old White Horse hastened to rub noses with him.

Star watched curiously, then edged cautiously toward them. His nose twitched, for Star was not quite sure whether he had better bite the Big Gray Horse or not. The stranger was so big and was certainly very handsome. He had a beautiful long silver tail and a heavy silver mane. His ears were very small and tapered to delicate points, his forehead was broad, and his eyes unusually large and bright. His neck arched proudly and when he moved every muscle beneath his glistening dappled skin told how powerful he was. Star reached him, and as they faced each other, the Big Gray Horse lifted a front hoof and pawed the ground lightly.

The Old White Horse watched him respectfully, and Running Deer joined the group, so that the four of them stood with their noses almost touching.

"Who are you?" asked Running Deer, when the Big Gray Horse showed plainly that he wanted to be friends.

"I am the horse of a general," was the proud answer.

"What is a general?" Star hastened to inquire, and the Big Gray Horse looked at him in surprise.

"A general is a great soldier who commands many men," he said. "General Mackenzie owns me, but I was confused by the noise and the darkness and thought that I was running with our troop horses. When I learned that I was among the Indian ponies it was too late for me to escape, for the Comanches chased me back into their own herd each time I tried to get away."

"I was confused, but not afraid," the Old White Horse explained. "I have been so many years a troop horse that I am not a coward in a fight. You believe that, don't you?" He looked anxiously at the Big Gray Horse.

"Yes," it answered. "Neither a man nor a

horse that has grown old in the service turns coward when he grows old. Sometimes we horses run just because other horses are running; sometimes we misunderstand our orders and run wild. That was how many horses broke loose when the Indian boys hit us over the heads and backs with those bits of buffalo hide. When some picket-ropes broke, the rest of us thought we would be left behind, so we all struggled until we were free. Then I ran, guided by the sound of other hoofs in the darkness, and not waiting to know whether those around me were troop horses or Comanche ponies. I thought I was doing what was right and best."

"And then what happened?" Star questioned eagerly.

"The soldiers fired their guns, and many tried to catch the running horses which were dragging long ropes. The Comanches were all around in the darkness. Then all I really knew after that was that a lot of us were among the Comanche ponies and the warriors were urging us on. It was dawn when we halted, and the soldiers were nowhere to be seen."

"Nearly all of the White Troop horses are with us," the Old White Horse spoke.

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Star lifted his head and glanced over the peacefully grazing herd, where a large number of white animals were mixed among the Comanche ponies. They were easily picked out, not only because of their colour, but also because they were much larger than the Indian ponies.

"Your fighting men cannot follow us," bragged Star, "for they have no ponies now."

"You are wrong," replied the Big Gray Horse. "There are hundreds more horses, hundreds more soldiers who will follow the Comanches. The white men are like the blades of grass, the stars in the sky, or the leaves of the trees in a great forest. No one can count them. Others will join our masters and keep on the trail until the Indians are all conquered. I know what I say, for I have listened to my General and all his officers talking while they rode together."

"Why do they wish to conquer us?" demanded Star angrily. "The land, the grass, the rivers belong to us! Why do the white men come out of far places to take these things away from us?"

"I am only a horse," the other replied. "How can I tell? I only know that my General holds the rein that guides me, and I love and obey him."

Sometimes while he rides slowly, he and the other officers talk together. Then we, their horses, listen. So we learn much, but there are many things none of us understand."

"Have you, too, heard them talk?" Running Deer questioned the Old White Horse which had kept silent all this time.

"I do not belong to an officer," he said. "I am only a troop horse. A soldier rides me and we must follow the officers. My rider is an old soldier. I am a very old troop horse. Our duty is to obey, not ask questions, nor reason. Whether we are on parade or fighting, all I have to remember is to mind the reins quickly, to listen sharply for the bugle calls, and to keep my eyes fixed on the little pointed flag of our troop. For that is the troop guidon. Where it leads, we follow."

"We horses do not want to fight you ponies," the Big Gray Horse went on as the Old White Horse stopped speaking. "We have no quarrel between us."

"Maybe if the Indians and the white men could understand one another's talk it would stop the fighting," Running Deer joined the conversation again. "We horses understand

one another and we do not want to fight. Preloch understood the Comanche tongue, and she did not fight them. She made peace between those who wished to fight in the tribe. When people do not understand one another that must be the reason for all the trouble!"

"Then white men never fight with one another!" Star exclaimed suddenly.

The Big Gray Horse and the Old White Horse hung their heads and were silent, while the two Comanche ponies looked at them.

"*Do the white men fight one another?*" demanded Running Deer at last.

"Yes, sometimes," the Big Gray Horse replied. "There are white men who steal, kill, betray, and oppress the weak and helpless. Those who know the law and break it are punished by the law."

"But the Indians do not know the white man's law, neither do they speak the same tongue," snorted Running Deer, while her eyes showed little red sparks of anger. "It was the white men who fought the Quahadas and took away Preloch and Prairie Flower."

"The Comanches had killed and stolen white women and children," replied the Big Gray

Horse. "So that was why the white men fought the Indians and took Quannah's mother and sister captive."

"Then how are the white men any better than the Comanches?" Running Deer snapped angrily. "You tell us that the white men are wise and good, and that the Comanches should learn the white men's ways and their laws, and yet you also say that the white men fight, steal, oppress, and kill one another, and if the Comanches take a white man's squaw or children, it is right for the white men to kill us, steal our women and children, and destroy our homes! If that is the right law for them, it is the right law for us. How can they teach us to be better than they are, themselves?"

"Just as you speak, I once heard an officer speak," responded the Big Gray Horse. "But when an order comes to an officer, he must obey. If we horses feel the reins, hear the bugle calling, see the troop guidon fluttering ahead of us, we ask no questions. Like our masters who ride us, we obey, for wherever the flag leads, we must follow and uphold it. There is much I do not understand, but I do know we horses have no quarrel with the Comanche ponies."

“Let us leave those things to men,” the Old White Horse said. “We horses are good friends and will not bite or kick one another. Why should we fight when there is grass enough for us all? The world is big!”

“You are right,” was Running Deer’s comment. “And now if you will come with me I will show you where the grass is sweeter and more tender than any other spot for miles around. Only a few ponies besides myself and Star know the place. We will share it with you.”

Side by side the troop horse and the horse of the general followed the Comanche mare and her colt.

Chapter XII

LIFE in the Quahada village went very happily for Star and Songbird after the return of Quannah and his warriors. The white men had evidently withdrawn from their chase of the Comanches, and Quannah did not intend to cause further trouble unless the buffalo hunters or other white people encroached upon the land which the Quahadas considered their own.

The Old White Horse and the Big Gray Horse seemed to be very well satisfied among the Indian ponies, but Star was a special favourite. More than once his mother chided him for liking the white men's horses better than older friends among the Comanche ponies. Sometimes she even drove him away from the cavalry horses and forced him to stay with the others. At such times Star did his best to escape her watchful eyes and return to his friends, but it was not an easy thing to accomplish. When his efforts failed, he would call loudly to the two horses, and their answers

told him that they understood he had not deserted them.

"Why do you want to stay beside them all the time?" Hawk asked him one day when Running Deer had shouldered and nipped Star until he was in the very midst of the herd.

"Because they teach me so many things our ponies do not know," he answered quickly.

"What can a white man's horse tell a Comanche pony?" Hawk said scornfully.

"A great many things," was Star's reply. "I listen to them talking to each other about big camps of white men, of strange houses that move as swiftly as lightning, and of the wonderful flag that floats every day from a tall white lodge-pole in the place where they live with many horses and soldiers."

"We have lodge-poles, too," Hawk spoke impatiently. "Can their flag bring rain like the Thunder Bird that lives in the forks of the pole of the Sacred Sun Lodge?"

"No," Star shook his head, "I asked the Big Gray Horse about that, and told him how the Sun caught the Thunder Bird and kept it prisoner in the forks of the tall pole of the Sacred Sun Lodge, and that no rain could fall

until our Medicine Men and warriors vanquished the Sun and set the Thunder Bird free; and how the Thunder Bird spread its great black wings and rain fell from its pinions upon the thirsty earth, so that the grass and flowers awoke from their sleep."

"Can their flag do that?" demanded Hawk.

"No; but he said that the flag on the lodge-pole meant that all those who came to it for help are treated kindly, and all who live under it are protected. I asked him if he thought that it could make the buffalo hunters and other men with fire-sticks leave the Quahadas in peace. He and the Old White Horse both said they were sure of it, if Quannah would lead us all there to talk."

"That was what the messengers from the Cheyenne, Arapahoe, and Kiowa camps said to Quannah," retorted Hawk. "The white men wanted them to make a treaty of peace in a big Medicine Lodge, and then the Indians would go and live where the white men put them. Quannah did not do it. He was wise. He would not trust the white people, nor let them rule the Quahadas, as though we were all captives. Who can tell what they would do afterward? Why

do you trust the two strange horses and their stories?"

"They are my friends!" Star's eyes were angry, his ears flattened backward, his lips twitched so that his teeth showed. As he thrust his head forward, Hawk jumped aside to avoid Star's strong teeth, and Running Deer stood in front of her colt.

"Why do you fight Hawk?" she snorted as Star moved out of her reach. "You and he have played together all your lives. His mother and I grew up together, and our mothers slept side by side before I was born. These strangers are not of our people. They will leave us when they have a chance to return to their own people, but we shall remain together until we die. That is right. The white men and their horses have their own ranges; the Indians and their ponies have other places. Whenever they meet there is trouble and sorrow. When they dwell apart there is peace. So why should you quarrel with Hawk about these strange horses of the white men?"

"I am sorry," spoke Hawk, edging more closely toward Star.

The other pony moved quickly and rubbed his

nose against Hawk's shoulder, saying, "I'm sorry, too. I was to blame, but I do like to listen to them talking."

"Let me go with you now and hear them," suggested Hawk.

"Yes, go!" said Running Deer, and she watched the two ponies trotting together toward the Old White Horse and the Big Gray Horse, who showed their pleasure at having the youngsters join them.

A couple of hours later as the ponies rested beside the big horses under the shade of a tree, Star scrambled hastily to his feet, saying, "Song-bird is calling me. Good-bye!"

It did not take long for him to reach her side. She was standing before the opening of the big tepee and a short tether was in her hand. Star bent his head so that she could slip the crude bridle back of his ears and around his nose, but there was no bit to be thrust into his mouth.

Then without saddle or blanket she prepared to mount. Grasping his shaggy mane in her strong little hands, she sprawled against his side and balanced her body across his back, after which she wriggled until she sat erect, with the single strand of rawhide in her left hand.

Star knew that the pressure of her knee meant for him to turn one way or the other. When she leaned forward and her bare brown legs clamped closely against his body, the pony understood, without whip or spur, that he must go faster. The lightest pull on the rawhide loop around his nose caused him to stop at once. Besides all this, the tones of Songbird's voice guided him, and he always did his best to obey and please her, because he loved her.

Often Songbird's pet fawn accompanied them. The fawn thought it great sport to outrun the pony, but at times Star reached slyly to nip the little creature, which took delight in teasing the pony and getting in front of it.

Some days the other Comanche children rode with Songbird, and when they raced their ponies Star could easily outdistance the rest. Most of the children rode the old ponies that were too stiff to be of value in trades. The Comanches traded ponies instead of using money like white people. The children bragged one to the other, about the number of ponies his, or her, father owned, and how fast those ponies could run. Songbird did not talk like the rest. Everyone knew that her father, Quannah, had the most

ponies of any warrior in any Indian tribe, and that his ponies were faster and more beautiful than all others.

She thought proudly of the pony races during festivals. When only the ponies of the Quahadas ran, Quannah's ponies were not among them, for he would not humiliate his own warriors by showing how slowly their ponies ran. But when the Cheyennes, Kiowas, or Arapahoes brought their best ponies to race against those of the Quahadas, Running Deer was led into the line of strange ponies.

As she stood among them, her bright eyes would note each lithe body, each nervous nostril, and the outlines of steeled muscles. Measuring her rivals she would toss her dainty head, and when the signal was given, would shoot away like an arrow from the other ponies and reach the goal ahead of them. Then amid wild shouts the Quahadas would gather about Running Deer who had upheld the honour of the tribe.

Later the defeated warriors would go back to their own camps, but the best ponies would be left behind with the herd of the Quahadas. Song-bird knew that some day Star would race for the honour of the tribe. So while the other children

raced and bragged, Songbird watched and was silent.

The games that Songbird played with the children were not so very different from many games played by white children in other parts of the world. Both boys and white girls shot arrows at targets, or, mounted on high stilts, chased one another between the tepees. There were wooden tops carved from tough limbs of trees, and the boys made whistles of reeds on which they blew music that the Indians loved.

Tiring of this they would turn to playing "Wolf" or "Chaser," which is much like "Tag," or it might be a game of "Hide Things" which was the name for "Hide and Seek." "Cat's Cradle" was played with strings of tough buckskin, and a great favourite among the boys was a breath-holding contest in which the boy who could hold his breath the longest was the winner, and the one who was first to fail was ridiculed by boys and girls.

Songbird and the other little girls had dolls which the squaws made for them. These were of buckskin painted gaily, and hair from the tails of ponies was sewed to the heads. The women

used threads of fine sinews, and sharply pointed bits of stout wood pushed the queer thread through the material. That was the way the Comanche women sewed, even in making their tents, their clothes, and their moccasins.

Keeping house and having feasts like dinner parties made many merry hours. The boys, who scorned to play with the dolls, were very glad to join the games when they saw cactus-fruit, pine nuts, dried wild berries, dried acorns, and maybe deer meat that had been cut into long narrow strips and hung in the sun until cured so that it could be eaten without being cooked. There might even be little cakes made of dried buffalo meat that had been pounded between two stones and mixed with dried berries.

Instead of candy they chewed dried mesquite beans, which were juicy inside, and though sweet were tart. Possibly a special treat had been prepared for the little housekeepers, and their mothers had given them cactus-fruit. Eagerly the children watched the gorgeous yellow blossoms form on the prickly-pear bushes, and when the petals fell, leaving the delicious fruit, they knew enough not to touch it, for it was thickly encrusted with tiny stickers. These were so *fine*

as to be almost invisible and were very painful as they worked into the flesh.

A tough stick was used to knock the fruit from the edge of the thick, flat, fleshy leaves that formed great clumps of the prickly-pear cactus. The thorns and skin were then removed with sharp sticks, or by placing for a few moments in hot ashes. The feast usually wound up with chewing gum obtained from the sweet sap of certain trees. It oozed through the bark, formed into dry lumps, and was all ready for any little Comanche who happened near.

So the men hunted deer and buffalo and made plans to protect their families and homes, and the women searched for roots, nuts, and berries for food and medicine, made clothes and cooked, while the children played their games, like other children all over the world, and listened to stories told in the tepees and by the camp fires, until the Spirit of Darkness rode his big black horse across the sky.

Then the children of the Quahada Comanches went into their tepee-homes, curled up on their beds of furry robes and slept.

But Songbird knew that Quannah and the

wisest and bravest men of the tribe sat in the big tepee talking very gravely, night after night, when they thought that she was sound asleep. She heard enough to understand that they did not think the white men had given up the fight, but would come again some day, and come in greater numbers to conquer the Quahadas.

Chapter XIII

SONGBIRD awakened early one morning and lost no time getting into her moccasins and buckskin dress. Then she braided her hair and fastened it with bits of red string.

Aided by one of the older squaws, she set the tepee in order for the day. The home of the Quahada Chief, though larger than other dwellings in the the big village, was built like the rest.

A circular framework of poles had been erected to form a peak where they joined near the top. There were twenty poles made of newn cedar trees. The poles were lashed together by hide ropes, then firmly sewed buffalo skins, stretched tauntly over them, were pegged solidly to the hard ground. But an opening at the top of the tepee permitted the ends of the poles to protrude.

In the centre of Songbird's home was a fire, arranged so that the smoke would pass through the opening at the top of the tepee. On either

side of this pit hung skins on crude frames. By moving these screens the smoke from the fire pit could be controlled when the wind shifted, thus making an inside chimney which carried off the smoke but allowed the warmth to spread in the tepee. Near the fire crotched sticks supported a pole on which clothes, robes, or moccasins could be hung when wet.

The doors or openings of all the tepees in the village faced the east, and were closed by flaps of buffalo hides on frames which enabled them to be lifted easily, yet which stayed in place during bad weather.

Two beds, or seats, were arranged inside the dwelling. One at a side, the other at the back. These beds were merely slightly raised platforms on which many soft robes had been thrown. But there were pillows of buckskin stuffed with the feathers of wild turkeys, geese, or ducks, mixed with long, soft hair cut from buffalo hides.

Decorated skins hung slanting from the centre of the room across and over the two beds, so that any water would be drained from the smoke hole in rainy weather, and thus the fire was protected, as well as the beds. The entire inside of the tepees had been painted by Moko in designs of

queer characters, or pictures of Comanches hunting or fighting.

Mats of woven bark and plaited rushes lay on the smooth, hard dirt floor. A border of interwoven twigs around the two beds kept cold drafts away in winter. During the summer the edges of the tepee were lifted and tied, thus allowing the breeze full sway.

Songbird was very proud of her home as she bustled around, sweeping the earth floor with her broom made of coarse grass and twigs. Then with the wing of a wild turkey, she carefully brushed the scattered ashes to the centre of the fire-pit. Her father's best saddle hung on a post, and on another was his big shield made of toughened buffalo hide.

She stood looking at the shield, for it was beautifully painted, and a fringe of buckskin bordered it all around. The buffalo hide had been shrunken over fire to make it twice as tough and thick as originally. Moko had told her about the important ceremony which took place when a new shield was made, and how the Medicine Man blessed it, so that it would protect the warrior who carried it.

She had also told how the Quahadas in battle

formed long lines, and the other Indians who were enemies made a line opposite. After that, one warrior rode out alone. Holding his shield high in the air, and balancing his long lance, he challenged his foes to send a warrior to meet him in single battle between the two lines of Indians.

Then the other Indians sent their best fighter, and the two tribes waited as the horsemen dashed toward each other, their ponies' manes and long tails flying while the silver mountings on their bridles clinked. The warriors leaning forward, with war bonnets of tall feathers that trailed almost to the ground, met in a crash, and then if the spear were not of tough wood, or the shield were not strong and tightly stretched, the tribe of the wounded warrior was humiliated as their champion fell from his pony.

No lance had ever pierced Quannah's shield, though he had met the foes of his tribes many times. But Songbird, small as she was, knew that the white men did not fight with lances and shields. Moko had said that the fire-sticks would tear the best shield the Quahadas could make, and that the men with the fire-sticks could stand far away yet kill the Quahada warriors before the Indians could reach their white foes.

"They will come back to-day." The old squaw, who was puttering among the cooking utensils at the back of the tent, spoke. "May the Great Spirit grant they bring much meat, for our dried meat must be cured before the days grow wet and cold."

"I have two prayer-sticks," answered Songbird, proudly pointing at little sticks fastened by cactus thorns to the wall of the teepee. "They will bring my father and his warriors back to us safely with all the meat and robes that are needed."

The little sticks, about as long as the hand of a grown man, were decorated with feathers, and other objects were attached by strings of buckskin. The feathers, from the breast of an eagle, were called "breath feather," for when the prayers were offered to the Great Spirit for any warrior, the "breath feather" carried it to the Great Spirit and the warrior was protected. Songbird knew that Karolo, the Medicine Man, had moistened the prayer-sticks with wonderful medicine, and that he had sprinkled them with sacred pollen. Karolo had given the prayer-sticks to Songbird to comfort her when she was alone.

"Yes," muttered the old woman, inspecting

the bit of dried meat that swung over the fire on a crotched stick, the other end of which was thrust into the ground, "this time we need not fear, for the white men have fled far away."

As she spoke, she sliced off some hot meat and placed it in a dish made from the bark of a tree. Songbird seated herself on the ground. On mats of woven grass were ladles of wild gourds, spoons fashioned from buffalo horns, shallow baskets woven of fine grass, and bowls made of red clay.

There were sharp utensils made of flint rocks or of crude metal to cut the food, if necessary, but mostly the breakfast consisted of pounded berries and nuts, and the freshly roasted meat, with a mushy substance prepared from maize.

This was a kind of corn grown by the Indians, and when dry it was soaked in lye made from wood ashes, to remove the tough outer skin. Then the squaws placed it in a hollowed stone, and with a round flat stone that fitted closely into the cavity they worked and pounded until there was a fine powder. The food was ready to be eaten at once, either dry or moistened with water, and was very nourishing.

After breakfast, Songbird was free to roam

where she pleased until such time as her father and his men should return from the big buffalo hunt on which they had started ten days before.

She had not told any one of her plan to slip away and ride out to meet her father. So without loss of time she reached Star where he was grazing among other ponies that had not been taken on the hunt.

When Star saw the rawhide rope in her hand, he lowered his head quickly, so that she could slip the noose across his nose and back of his ears. He was glad of a chance to run that morning, for the sun was so bright, the air so bracing, the grass so soft and green and the sky so blue, as he galloped across the rolling prairie with his little mistress on his back.

Chapter XIV

SEVERAL miles from the village, Songbird saw the hunting party coming toward her, and she dug her heels sharply into Star's side to urge him faster on the way. Star did not need pushing, for he knew that Quannah was riding Running Deer. The greeting between the colt and his mother was as affectionate as that between the father and daughter.

Side by side Star and his mother loped happily, while Songbird chattered to her father, who looked at her with loving pride as she sat gracefully on her pony's back, her cheeks pink from the touch of the breeze and her excitement showing in her dark, glowing eyes.

Back of Quannah and his little daughter rode the warriors, leading ponies laden with antelope and buffalo meat, while still other ponies carried rolled buffalo hides.

The meat that had been obtained on the hunt, would be cut into thin strips and dried in the sun. This would preserve it for use without any dan-

ger of its spoiling, and the robes would be tanned and used for many purposes. No lack of food or warm robes need be feared now, and where the tepees needed mending it could be done without trouble. The extra robes would be exchanged by the Quahadas for articles which they might desire from some other tribe, or even traded for more ponies.

So there was much rejoicing when the hunting party reached the village an hour later, and preparations were rushed for a great celebration. In addition to the successful hunt it was time for the Festival of the Green Corn. This was the Quahada Thanksgiving Day, when they thanked the Great Spirit for an abundance of maize and other necessities of their daily lives.

Songbird, turning Star loose, wandered about the camp and watched the squaws at work. Children ran from their tepees to the place where the camp fires had been built. Each family had a separate fire for the celebration, and when everything was ready big bunches of corn were carried by each to the special family fire, where the squaws roasted the ears of maize.

While they were doing this the men formed in a large circle about the fires. The Medicine

Man, Karolo, and Quannah, with Gray Beard, Spotted Leopard, and Big Wolf, were in the centre. The other men who formed the circle danced around the chiefs, and as they danced they shouted the Song of the Green Corn. This was accompanied by monotonous music made by the pounding with dry buffalo bones on skins tightly drawn over hoops of bent wood.

When the dancing was over, the men all sat down close together, while Karolo spoke to them and made a prayer of thanksgiving to the Great Spirit. Each of the chiefs spoke after him. Then Karolo walked around the circle of little fires and lifting his hands above each heap of roasted corn, he blessed it.

After he had blessed all the corn, the Quahadas, men, women, and children, began to eat it, talking and laughing or calling across to one another as they enjoyed the feast that the Great Spirit had provided and blessed through Karolo.

The children listened to the talk of their elders as they sat beside the fires after the feast. There were stories of brave deeds, tales of mighty hunters, and then all were silent as Moko related the story of how the buffaloes were sent to the Comanches. Moko was not only the Picture

Maker of the Quahadas, but also the Story Teller. It was through the Story Teller of the tribe that the younger people knew of those who had gone to the Happy Hunting Grounds long before the grandparents of old Moko had been born. And Moko was the oldest living person among the Quahadas. So all of them, young and old, men and women, listened respectfully as she spoke.

“So many moons ago it happened, that the Indians cannot count them now,” she said, poking the ashes with a long stick. “The Sun Spirit, angered because the Thunder Bird had flown across the sky day after day, made a trap and caught him. So the Sun held the Thunder Bird captive that it might not fly across the sky and make shadows with its great black wings. Because of this there was no rain and the earth grew thirsty. Then the grass died and the young corn shrivelled away.

“The ponies grew thin and weak, the streams shrank to small threads of water and many of them became dry sand. The antelopes moved away or died because there was no grass, and though the Medicine Man planted his prayer-sticks and begged the Great Spirit to help his

children, the Great Spirit did not listen to his voice.

“Then a young man of the Quahadas, and his wife, knowing that their people would starve, wandered away together, hand in hand, to seek the Great Spirit and offer him their own lives for the sake of their people with whom the Great Spirit was angry.

“For three days before they started neither of them had eaten even a mouthful of maize, nor had they taken any water, so that there might be more left for the others who were not so strong as they were.

“Across the desert of hot sand that burned like fire against their bare feet, they two wandered alone. For many days they found nothing but heat, thirst, and hunger, and often they lay down on the scorching sand, too weak to go farther. But when they had rested a few minutes, they remembered their people, and so they rose wearily and continued their search for the Great Spirit.

“And one day the Great Spirit, who had been watching them all the time, appeared before them and said that because he had seen their great love and pity and knew that their own

sufferings had not made them weaken in their search for him, their prayers would be answered, and the sacrifice of their lives was not desired by him. He touched the dry sand, and a stream of clear water ran past their feet, so they fell upon the sand and thanked the Great Spirit. Then they laid their lips in the cool ripples, and drank their fill.

“As they arose they saw food before them and many strange beautiful fruits, which the Great Spirit bade them eat. Then he told them of the Sun Dance and how the big Sun Lodge must be built, and how the chiefs and the Mediciné Men could vanquish the Spirit of the Sun when it held the Thunder Bird captive.

“After they had eaten and had thanked the Great Spirit, they promised to do as he bade them. Then the man and the woman returned rejoicing of their people and gave the message to them.

“And the Quahadas obeyed the Great Spirit, and made a prisoner of the Sun, so the Thunder Bird was free. Then it stretched its broad wings and flew swiftly over the land. The rain fell from the black feather tips until the land was flooded and the grass leaped up.

the flowers bloomed, the antelopes returned, the ponies of the Quahadas grew fat and strong and the whole tribe rejoiced because the Great Spirit smiled upon them and their children.

“One day they saw a great black mass like a thunder cloud sweeping across the prairie close to the ground. As it drew nearer they saw that it was not a cloud, but a vast herd of strange, big, black animals, such as none of them had ever seen before, and of which no one had ever told them or their forefathers. Then the Quahadas hid their faces, for they heard the voice of the Great Spirit speaking from the sky.

“Because you have obeyed me, my anger has passed away and I give you this new food. Kill these buffaloes when you need meat, when you need clothes, when you need tepees. These are all mine and I give them to you, my children. You must take only what you need. If you slay them when you have enough food, clothes, robes, or tepees, I will take all the buffaloes away, and I will also take from you again the grass and water.”

“So the buffaloes were given to the Indians; and we must never forget the words of the Great Spirit as he spoke to our forefathers that

day, many, many moons ago. So many moons that none of us can count them now!"

Shaking her white head and muttering to herself, old Moko went to her tepee, and Songbird, with the other children, sat watching the games played by the men and women.

Some of the men held arrows, which they tossed while other men threw their own arrows to try to stop the flight of the first arrow as it went swiftly past. It required great skill and a keen eye to measure the flight of the arrow and break it.

Other men, holding netted bats, like tennis rackets, played with a ball and kept it moving between them for a long time. The players had to keep the ball from falling to the ground and the rule was that if any man touched the ball with his hand, he must leave the game and pay a fine.

The younger men wrestled in pairs, each one striving to throw the other to the ground and hold him down until Big Wolf, Spotted Leopard, or Gray Beard had decided which one was the winner.

Little Songbird, sitting among the other children, cracked nuts between stones, and with a

sharp, stout cactus thorn picked out the meats and ate them, until at last, too tired to keep her eyes open any longer, she curled herself on a buffalo robe and went to sleep.

So soundly she slept that she did not awaken, even when her father found her and carried her to their tepee home.

Chapter XV

THE women of the Quahada village were very busy for weeks after the return of the buffalo hunters and the Festival of the Green Corn. Not only did they have their usual duties to perform, but in addition they had to preserve the meat and tan the hides of the buffaloes and antelopes that had been brought back by the men.

The children helped cut the meat into long, thin pieces so that it could be hung in the hot sun until the outer part was dry and hard. It was then tied together with bits of buckskin or dried sinews and stored away for future use. Thus prepared it could be eaten without further cooking, or carried by the Comanches from place to place. Often, as they rode along, they ate the meat without stopping for other food. With this and a little pounded maize, or a bit of dry vegetable root, they were able to travel many days.

The big skins had to be cured at once, lest they spoil. So while the children were cutting

the meat, the women staked all the hides on the ground, fur side down. Then two women took charge of each hide.

Songbird did not help the other children cut the meat, but she watched the squaws who bent over a very large hide which Quannah had brought home. The women were busy scraping off all the tiny bits of flesh that still clung to the inner surface, using flat, sharp-edged bones, while a thong of buckskin around their wrists gave extra strength to their efforts. She was greatly interested in that robe, for when it had been thoroughly cured Moko was going to paint on it the picture of the big fight.

"Let me help," she begged the women.

But they shook their heads and answered, "It is Quannah's robe. We must be very careful of it."

Then Songbird ran to where her father was standing not far away from his tepee and looked wistfully into his face.

"Let me help the women cure the big robe you brought," she pleaded. "I will be very careful not to hurt it. I cannot fight, nor hunt, nor paint stories, but I want to help with the robe because you brought it back, and Moko is going

to paint the picture of your big fight with the white men.”

She caught the slight nod and waited no longer, but raced back in almost breathless delight to tell the squaws. They made room for her between them, slipping thongs over her small wrists so that her stroke might be strong and steady.

Very gravely she imitated their motions and listened to their instructions. Then, the first part of their work completed, they gave her a tool made like a hoe with a long handle attached, the bottom part formed of a sharp stone. Several women joined them in the work, and all of them warned Songbird to be most cautious not to tear or roughen the hide with the sharply edged tool.

So as the days went by she did her part in curing the robe. When it was staked out, hair side up, she too, rubbed the long fur with a cooked mixture made of meat, roots and herbs. Then she watched the women arrange masses of dried grass in the centre, gather up the ends and sides, and twist the robe into a tight ball which they put to soak over night.

She felt very proud and important the next

morning as she hurried to the women, who already held the ends, and were standing far apart twisting the hide into a long, hard rope, from which liquid was dripping. When they began to stretch three sides of the robe on a large, slanting frame, Songbird helped industriously, and she also did her part in staking the lower end of the skin to the ground.

After that she sat quietly watching work that she was not tall enough nor strong enough to do. One of the two women who had first worked on the hide now took a broad blade of thin stone, almost six feet long. A piece of bone made a handle in the centre of the thin stone slab. The blade was pressed strongly against the upper end of the hide, and then drawn quickly and firmly toward the bottom, so that all moisture oozed down.

The second woman, with the same kind of tool, at once did the same thing, so that no water could be again soaked up by the hide. This work went on until no moisture rose to the surface, then the skin was left to dry and bleach on the frame.

A number of days passed before the robe was dry enough for the next work, which had to be

done while the skin was still on the frame. Each of the women had a round buffalo joint, like a large knuckle, and with this they rubbed the entire surface of the hide, to make it the same thickness all over.

When that had been properly finished, every tear was mended carefully with threads of strong sinews thrust through tiny holes made by awls which were fashioned of sharply pointed tough wood, or of thin flint stones.

Then nothing remained to do except for the squaws to hold the cross-corners of the robe around a large rough tree and draw it back and forth, fur-side out. This removed the last bit of stiffness, and the women of the village gathered about the robe, examining and praising its softness.

Songbird ran to her father. "It is done!" she cried in delight. "Come see it! All the women say that it is the largest and finest robe the Quahadas have ever seen!"

Her hand was tugging, while her eager feet danced ahead of Quannah's more sedate pace. But at last they came to the place where the women formed an admiring group about the largest buffalo robe that had ever been brought

into their camps. They made way for the chief, who passed between them in quiet dignity, and Songbird, beside him, held her little head high with pride—not pride for herself, but pride of her father, the chief, who was so brave, so great, and so good.

“It is good,” he spoke at last, after he had studied the robe closely. “Moko shall paint on it the story of the Big Fight when our little boys frightened the white horses. So, the children of our children shall learn the story.”

Songbird trotted beside the chief, followed by the two women, until they all reached Moko’s tepee. Then the squaws went their way, and Songbird listened to her father telling Moko about the fight and how the little boys had captured the white horses while the firesticks had shrieked and spit, but did not hurt them.

“They were little boys,” said Quannah with a smile of pride on his lips. “Just children! but some day they will make great warriors.”

“I shall paint the story as you have told it,” Moko answered, while her fingers stroked the long hair on the robe. “The children of our children shall be proud of their forefathers, and the story shall be told in tepees and by the

camp fires long after the Great Eagle shall bring the message of the Great Spirit to call Quannah, Chief of the Quahada Comanches, to the Happy Hunting Grounds, where Peta Nocon is waiting for his son!"

Chapter XVI

AS MOKO painted the battle on the big robe, Songbird sat beside her, day after day, watching the picture grow. There were white men with fire-sticks, Comanches with war-bonnets, and horses running in every direction, while two little boys waved pieces of buffalo robes to frighten the horses of the white men and keep the animals running toward the Comanches.

The old Picture Maker talked while she worked, and Songbird kept perfectly quiet as she heard the stories of the great warriors or wise men of the tribe.

“They are gone,” said Moko. “All of whom I had told you, heard the cry of the Great Eagle and answered it with the Death Song of the Quahadas. They did not fear that call, for they knew that the Great Eagle is the messenger from the Great Spirit, and when the shadow of the Great Eagle fell upon them, the big, strong wings lifted and carried them to the Happy Hunting Grounds to meet the Great

Spirit and the spirits of their friends. But the cry of the Great Eagle is a terrible thing to hear if a man has not lived with honour. Then he cowers and cries out in fear, because he knows that he must stand alone and face the anger of the Great Spirit, who will drive him away from his friends and make him travel alone forever in darkness."

"Only three tribes now are left of the five big tribes of the Comanches who came out of the land of snows so many winters ago that no living man knows when it was," continued Moko.

"Each tribe was under its own chief, yet all lived together and were brothers. They did not fight one against the other. There were the Cost-che-teght-kas, or Buffalo Eaters; the Pen-e-teght-kas, or Honey Eaters; the No-ko-ness, or Wanderers; the Yam-per-i-cos, or Root Diggers, and the Quahadas, who were called Chatz-ken-ners, or Antelope Eaters." The old woman had been speaking very slowly, checking off each tribe on the gnarled fingers of her left hand.

Songbird's eyes were full of questions, but she knew that when Moko told a story, it made her angry to be interrupted by questions, and then the story was left unfinished.

“Together their forefathers came from the far north where snow covers the ground all the time,” Moko went on. “They came on sleds made from hides of strange snow animals, and the sleds were drawn by wild dogs that were more like lobo wolves than our Indian dogs.

“For a long distance they travelled; but the snow melted and the dogs sickened and died, so the Comanches could go no farther. Then the head chiefs and all the Medicine Men of the five tribes prayed that the Great Spirit would help them, and while they prayed a big herd of wild horses approached the camp.

“The Comanches worked patiently until they caught a pony using a long rope and noose made of hides from their broken sleds. After they had caught the first pony, an Indian got on it and rode among the others, and soon they had a pony for each Comanche. That was how the Comanches became “pony Indians” instead of foot Indians who followed the dog teams in the land of long snows.

“Then they started south once more, and the wild ponies followed those which the Comanches rode, until they found a place where the snows fell only a short time. There they found

grass for the ponies. Antelopes, roots, and berries furnished food for the Indians, and fish swimming in the rivers were caught by hooks made from curved thorns on the bushes near the water. So the Comanches stayed there and thrived and were happy until strange people found the place.

“The Comanches met them as friends, for they had no quarrel with any man in those days, and they believed that the new people were sent by the Great Spirit and were his children. The faces of the strangers were white, and they were so tall that even the tallest Comanche’s head did not reach these men’s shoulders.

“From the rising of the sun to its setting, the strange men built strong forts and big towns on high places. They were brave, war-like and proud, and the Comanches were their friends and brothers, until the white men forgot justice and mercy and honour and fought the Indians, driving them from their homes and taking their lands. Our people moved back, but the others followed, until the Indians, in despair, begged the Great Spirit to save their families and their homes.

“Then the anger of the Great Spirit fell upon

the white men, and he swept them with fires that destroyed their great cities and forts. Floods carried away their horses, and disease wiped their people from the face of the earth, until only great earth mounds and a few crumbling ruins were left of the cities and fortresses, and not one of their people remained in the land.

“But the Comanches were blessed by the Great Spirit, so that they thrived and were happy. And now, other white men have come, and they, too, fight us and wish to take our lands and ponies and game and destroy our homes. But in the same way, sorrow will come to these other white men who are driving the Indians from their homes. They forget that the Great Spirit watches all. He sent Preloch, the mother of Quannah, to us and through her son the Quahadas shall find the way to honour and peace and their children shall prosper.”

“Moko”—Songbird leaned nearer the Picture Maker, who looked down into her face—“my father wants to bring Preloch and Prairie Flower back here again. Do you think the white men will let them come if my father does not fight?”

“They will come back,” answered Moko, looking through the opening of the tepee and across

the prairie, as though she saw the mother and the baby coming toward the camp. "The white men took them away, but the Great Spirit will bring her back to her own people. The white men are strong and many, but the Great Spirit is stronger. The white men will do as the Great Spirit bids, and Preloch and Prairie Flower will come back again with honour, and her husband, Peta Nocona, will be honoured, and the white men will honour their son, Quannah, Chief of the Quahadas."

"When will they come, Moko?" whispered Songbird, her eyes shining with joy. "My father speaks many times of his wish to bring them back so that some day he may sleep beside them among our people."

"Only the Great Spirit knows," the Picture Maker said, and her white head bent over the wrinkled hands that lay idly in her lap. "I am old and weary with sorrow. Before many moons I shall hear the cry of the Great Eagle, but you, the daughter of Quannah, shall see and know that I have spoken the truth this day. Preloch and Prairie Flower will come back to the Quahadas. The trees, the wind, the stars have given me this promise because I am old

and weary and cannot stay with my people much longer, but I know it is the truth, for the Great Spirit watches over us all, and he is just."

So months passed in the Comanche village, and there was great rejoicing when the big buffalo robe had been finished and hung in the tent of Quannah.

Songbird often sat before it when she was alone, and as she looked at it, she remembered Moko's promise that some day Preloch and Prairie Flower would come back to the Quahadas with honour. She knew that it would make her father very happy, but she asked the Great Spirit to bring them back very soon, so that Moko might see them once more before the call of the Great Eagle came to the old Picture Maker who had loved Preloch so dearly.

While Songbird had been helping with the robe and listening to Moko's tales, Star had been learning many things about the white people from the Big Gray Horse and the Old White Horse. Running Deer tolerated the two cavalry horses, but she never became their friend. Hawk, after grazing with them and Star for a few days, deserted them. When Star asked the reason, Hawk whirled and faced him.

"I like the Indian ponies better," was his reply. "The strange horses talk of things I never heard about."

"That is just why I listen to them," said Star.

Hawk yawned sleepily. "What good does it do you to know about those things? All I want to know is where to find the best grass and clearest pools of water, and what tree casts the heaviest shadow when the sun is hot."

"You do not belong to the chief," retorted Star. "A chief must know more than his people, so that he can lead them, and the ponies of a chief should know other things besides eating and drinking and sleeping. That is why I like to hear the Big Gray Horse and the Old White Horse talk."

"How can their talk help you, or the Quahadas?" snorted Hawk contemptuously.

"I do not know." Star spoke slowly. "Some day, they say, the white men will come back to fight the Quahadas and conquer them, as the Big Gray Horse says they have conquered other Indians. Maybe if I listen carefully and ask questions I shall be able to help Quannah and Songbird when the white men come to fight."

"You must have been eating crazy weed,"

grunted Hawk, "for you do not know how to think right any more. If the white men come, Quannah will send little boys to whip them and frighten them and their horses, as he did that other time. Go back to the strange horses, if you wish, but I shall keep away from them and their foolish talk."

Hawk tossed his head, kicked his heels high in the air, and galloped away, while Star went slowly back to the two cavalry horses. Both of them nickered softly as he drew near, then their noses touched him, and their soft eyes were so friendly that Star forgot how much Hawk's unkindly manner had hurt him a few minutes before.

In his heart Star knew that Hawk was wrong to believe that nothing was worth while except eating and drinking and sleeping, but he and Hawk had been companions ever since they had been old enough to stand on their feet, and it was not easy to give up his old friend.

Chapter XVII

IT WAS September, as the white men count the months, and three years had passed since the Big Gray Horse and the Old White Horse had come to live among the Quahada ponies. The summer had been very hot and no rain had fallen, so there was only a scant supply of dry feed for the ponies and buffaloes and antelopes.

What grass had grown in spite of the drought had been eaten by a swarm of locusts, so that only the bare stalks remained, and these held no nourishment. Where small streams had rippled, there were beds of dry sand. Larger rivers, big enough to have floated a good-sized boat when there was no drought, dwindled down to shallow threads or formed in pools of stagnant water coated with green slime. It was a hard time for the Quahada ponies, and still harder for the Indians.

Songbird watched her father's face anxiously. She knew that he would not allow any one to

see whether he were worrying, rejoicing or grieving at any time. It would be unworthy of a warrior to show his feelings, and most unworthy of a chief. She had heard the squaws talking when no men were near.

They had said that when the last winter had gone and it had been time for the green grass to show above the ground, all the Indians from long distances had gathered at Medicine Lodge to hold a great council of war.

Reports had been brought that Indian runners, or messengers, had found a big camp where a large number of buffalo hunters lived, and from it each day the white men went to kill buffaloes. They did not use the meat, but left it to spoil in the hot sun, after the hunters had skinned the dead animals and taken the hides away. As far as the Indians could travel, dead buffaloes that had been skinned lay in herds just as they had fallen when the hunters had shot them with fire-sticks.

On their fingers the Indians counted how many buffaloes had been found in one day of travel. Some of them had seen as many as two hundred, and other Indians who had come from different directions told the same tale. Soon

there would be no buffaloes left. The grass was gone, the water was growing less each day, the ponies would become thinner and weaker, and when the hunters had killed the buffaloes, the Indians would die, and the white men would cover the land.

So the Indians from all the tribes of the Southwest gathered at Medicine Lodge and formed a war party to drive out the white hunters and save the buffaloes.

That had been six moons ago, when the grass was just starting above the ground. In a little while they had thought that the rains and warm sun would make plenty of feed for the ponies, antelopes, and buffaloes, and there would be pools of water in low places between hills, or in hollows of large rocks. Then it would be the time to begin fighting.

But the rains did not come, and Songbird, listening to the talk of the squaws, longed to speak to her father and ask him about it all, but she knew that such things were not for children's talk. Nor did she ask the squaws, for they would be angry that she had listened to them.

"If only Moko were here I could ask her," she said to herself sadly.

But Moko had heard the call of the Great Eagle six moons ago, and now it was nearing winter. Songbird greatly missed her old friend, the Picture Maker. Moko had always answered questions and explained things without being cross. The other women were too busy asking one another what they would do in the winter, when the dry summer had killed the berries and nuts and maize and the buffalo hunters had killed all the game.

So Songbird kept her thoughts to herself and watched her father's grave face as he talked with Karolo or the head chief.

Then one day a Kiowa runner dashed into the Quahada village and the warriors gathered quickly about him. His pony wandered over and joined the Quahada ponies and the two cavalry horses, where they were nosing at dry stubble and hoping to find a bit of green feed at the roots.

"The white men are fighting the Indians again," the Kiowa pony said.

"The Indians cannot hide from them always," spoke the Big Gray Horse, who looked alertly at the Kiowa pony.

"I told you that the white men would keep

coming until all the Indians have been conquered"—the Old White Horse turned to Star. "It makes no difference how bravely the Indians fight, nor whether they are right or wrong, the end is the same. They are conquered and must obey the white men. But maybe that is best for all."

"It would be best for all if each let the other alone!" answered Star. "If men had as much sense as horses have, there would be less trouble for all of us. We do not fight, though some of us belong to the Quahadas, others to the Kiowas, and you," he turned to the cavalry horses, "belong to a general and to a soldier who obeys the general. If there were ponies here from the Arapahoes and the Cheyennes, or any other tribes, we would all graze together and not bite nor kick one another. Why, then, do men fight one another?"

"Men are different," the Big Gray Horse spoke.

"It is a pity they do not know how silly we think they are!" snorted Hawk, joining the group.

"They are our masters," the Old White Horse rebuked him quickly. "Young horses kick and

buck and bite, or run away when they first are brought to a troop. But they learn soon what it means to be hurt by heavy bits in their mouths, or sharp spurs digging into their sides. If a horse throws a man, another man gets on the horse's back at once, and then another and another, until the horse is too weary to fight. I have heard young horses talk about men, but it does no good. They all talk the same, then they understand, and so they stop fighting against the bit, the spur, the saddle, and the rider, and they obey. After that they, too, listen when young horses talk as they themselves once did. For when all is said and done, men are our masters! We will obey them whether they are white men or Indians, because we belong to them and must serve them. I, too, bit and fought and bucked men from my back, long ago."

As they talked, Quannah and his head chiefs, accompanied by the Kiowa warrior, approached the ponies. When the Quahadas stopped, the Kiowa slipped his bridle of rawhide over the nose of his pony, which submitted quietly. Its owner's hand rested lightly on the pony's neck and the animal's eyes watched its master's face. He was speaking to the Quahadas now.

“This is the message. The Big Father at Washington has sent his soldiers. They come in numbers like the leaves on the trees, or the blades of grass on the prairie. Our runners have brought word that the soldiers are coming to surround and kill all of the Indians. Big chiefs lead the white men from four sides. A friendly Indian sent us word that a big chief named Miles leads them all, and that Mackenzie, who fought us three winters ago, is with the others. He has not forgotten the rout of the White Horses yet.”

The Old White Horse cocked his ears, and the Big Gray Horse lifted his head high. Star saw them look at each other, and he remembered they had often talked of these big white chiefs.

“I am Mackenzie’s horse,” the Big Gray Horse said proudly. “Officers and soldiers do not lie to Indians, nor kill their game, nor take their land from them for themselves. When the Indians give a pledge of peace the officers do not harm them, nor their women or children. They make the buffalo hunters keep away from the Indian’s land and protect the Indian who does not go on the warpath.”

“I know that is true”—the Old White Horse

spoke earnestly—"for I lived many years in the White Horse Troop and have seen all these things myself. If Quannah would be friends with the big white chiefs, it would be better for him and for the Quahadas. Listen! He is speaking now."

The horses turned their eyes on the Quahada chief, who, with the best warriors of the tribe, faced the Kiowa runner. The Comanches, like the ponies, watched Quannah's face and waited to hear his words. Karolo, the Medicine Man, stood beside him.

Karolo had offered many prayer-sticks to the Great Spirit, asking that the Thunder Bird might be sent over the land with rain and that the buffaloes might be spared. But the Great Spirit was angry and would not listen. Then Karolo knew that it was because the white men had come on the Indians' land and were killing the buffaloes that belonged to the Great Spirit, who had said the buffaloes must not be killed except for food and clothing. Only by driving the white men away and saving the buffaloes, would the Great Spirit's anger be appeased.

Yet Karolo was sad. He knew that the white men were many times the number of the Coman-

ches, and that their fire-sticks could reach much farther than the Quahada arrows. In his heart the old Medicine Man felt that the Indians could not win, but would be conquered and made prisoners by the white men, if they were not all killed in the fight. Quannah had talked this over with Karolo many, many times.

The chief looked past the Indians, past the tepees of the village, and fixed his eyes on the crest of a hill beyond the camp. For a little while he did not speak, then he glanced at the faces of his chiefs before he answered the Kiowa runner.

“Tell your chiefs that the Quahadas will join them against the white men.”

He held out both his hands and the Kiowa grasped them, saying, “It is good!”

Turning quickly the messenger leaped to his pony's bare back. Sitting erect, he gave the loud, fierce battle cry of the Kiowas. Instantly the Quahadas answered it with their own call. Then the women, running from their tepees, and the children who stood beside them, took up the cry.

The Kiowa, leaning low on his pony's neck, darted out of sight, carrying word that Quannah

would lead his warriors to join the fight against the white men.

When the last echoes of the war cries had died away, the Quahada warriors heard their chief say slowly, "We will fight! It is the last stand of the Quahada Comanches, but we will fight so that our fathers will not be ashamed when they hear the Great Eagle calling us."

Then they left him standing there, and went to their own tepees, where their wives and children awaited them.

For the next week the village was bustling with preparations, and day by day the Kiowa warriors arrived from distant points. At last the entire body of Kiowas and Quahadas, riding their best ponies and driving the immense herd of extra ponies and those that were laden with food, robes, bows and arrows, formed a great cavalcade. All the warriors were decked in gorgeous war bonnets and armed with lances and shields, while quivers that were full of arrows hung across their backs beside strong bows. Only the women and small children were left behind. Even the oldest men and youths who were ten years old rode behind the Quahada chief.

Songbird watched her father lead them up the

slope of the hill. He turned Running Deer about, and his figure stood plainly against the blue sky where the incline ended sharply.

For a few minutes he looked down on the homes of his people, then his eyes wandered to those who rode up the hill toward him. His arm was raised high above his head, and Running Deer leaped at the touch of his heels. Swirling at the pressure of the rein, the mare disappeared over the crest of the hill.

The last of the riders vanished. Their cries came more faintly, until a strange silence fell upon those who stood watching the hilltop where no living thing was now visible. Long after the women and other children had dispersed to take up the everyday routine of their lives, Songbird stood alone watching the top of the hill.

Chapter XVIII

SONGBIRD was not the only one who was lonesome. Star, too, had been left in camp, where only a few ponies, whose knees were too stiff, or whose backs were weak from age, kept him company. Although he was no longer a colt, he hated to be away from his mother and friends. Even the Big Gray Horse and the Old White Horse had been taken with Quannah.

Star had heard Quannah say to Songbird, "He is your pony. I have enough without him, for I will take the Big Gray Horse to ride if Running Deer grows tired. So I will leave Star with you."

Three weeks after the warriors had left the village, Star wandered up to the big tepee and poked at the entrance with his nose. Songbird lifted the flap and stroked his nose, for she had heard him coming. Then she dropped the flap again, as she did not want any one to see what she was doing.

First she took pieces of dry buffalo meat and tied them together in a bunch, then she laid them carefully in a large square of buckskin. With them she placed some of the little cakes made of pounded meat and nuts, and as she glanced around she saw a prayer-stick, which she laid on the other things. The four corners of the buckskin were then drawn together and bound securely by a twisted thong.

After these preparations she took her doll and tucked it into the belt that held her robe at the waist. It was now almost dark.

She went out of the tepee and mingled with the other children, until they scattered for the night. Then Songbird returned to the tepee and sat alone, her arms about her knees, and her eyes staring steadily beyond the raised flap at the dim outline of the hill over which her father had ridden.

Satisfied, at last, that no one would notice her, she slipped cautiously from the tepee and made her way to where Star was stretched out among the old ponies. A hobble was on his front ankles, so that he would not stray during the night.

Songbird unfastened the hobble and thrust it

into the bundle she was carrying, and Star rose to his feet. His head bent for the bridle in her hand. She did not mount the pony, but led him away from camp without arousing any one. Then clutching the bundle which she had prepared in the tepee, she climbed to Star's back and turned his head in the direction in which her father had led the warriors.

She had no fear that she would not be able to find them, for she knew their ponies would make a plain trail, and though she could not see it herself, Star would know and follow it. The Great Spirit taught ponies how to do that.

It was the memory of Preloch, who had ridden beside Peta Nocona when he had gone to fight the white men, that made Songbird determine that she would find her father and ride with him. She could shoot arrows as well as any large boy, and she could ride much better than most of them.

If her father told her that she could not stay and fight, she would remind him that the little boys who had frightened the white horses had not been any older than she was now. So she had brought her bow and all the arrows that she had been saving for a long time, and when she found

her father she would show him that she was not a baby. She had her bow, her arrows, food to eat, and Star, who could outrun any other Quahada pony except Running Deer.

So she rode while it was dark, trusting Star to keep the trail. When the sun rose, the hoof prints of unshod ponies could be seen distinctly, though in some places the wind had stirred dry sand over them.

As a slight rise in the ground gave her a chance to look back, Songbird saw nothing moving, and felt quite sure that no one in the village had yet discovered her absence. Knowing that only slow old horses remained in the camp with the squaws, she hastened on her way, determined to lose no time in putting as many miles as possible between herself and any who might try to follow her.

It was only when the sun was low in the sky that Star and his little rider halted beside a shallow pool that had once been a deep water-hole in a swiftly running stream.

While Songbird lay on her face and drank her fill, Star, a short distance away, thrust his hot nose into the water and gulped greedily. Then he turned his attention to some green grass that had grown about the edge of the pool, in

spite of the drought, while Songbird, sitting beside the water-hole, munched a piece of dry buffalo meat and one of the little cakes made of pounded corn and nuts that she had packed for her journey.

As the sun sank beyond the edge of the land, Songbird, weary but not afraid, lay down on the ground to sleep. Star, hobbled carefully to prevent his straying far, stretched near her. He did not sleep.

At the least sound he lifted his head and pricked up his ears, while he peered with bright eyes into the night. He knew that coyotes might be prowling close, and he was ready to leap to his feet and fight them with his strong teeth and nimble heels if they came where his little mistress slept so soundly. Once in the night she woke. He heard her move, then suddenly she called in a half-frightened voice:

“Star!”

His soft nicker answered that he had not left her, and he rose to go close to her. When he settled down again, Songbird’s hand rested on his shoulder and her head was pillowed on his neck. Her other hand held her doll.

Thus the sun saw them when it peeped over

the opposite edge of the world the next morning. Then it shot golden arrows silently, and Songbird's eyes opened. For a few minutes she wondered where she was, but as Star twitched a little she raised her head quickly and sat up, rubbing her eyes sleepily.

Star lost no time in getting on his feet. He had kept very still so that he might not disturb her, and it felt good to move about. Songbird reached down and unfastened the hobbles that held his front feet so that he could take only short steps of about eight inches, or hop with both front feet at the same time. As soon as he was free he lay down and rolled over three times without stopping, kicking his heels in the air. It was easy to roll over now that he was so strong and fully grown.

It did not take long for the two wanderers to finish breakfast. A drink of water from the pool, and food such as they had eaten for dinner the previous night, satisfied them both. After that, Songbird slipped the rawhide bridle on Star, picked up her doll and carefully brushed the dust from it, then tucked it safely into her belt. Mounting her pony, she started again on her way to find her father.

But the trail became more faint, and a hot, dry wind blew dust into her eyes. As the sun rose higher the wind became stronger, and at last nothing but a haze of yellow dust could be seen. Star plodded on, but at intervals he whinnied shrilly, hoping to hear an answer through the dust storm. Only the sound of the wind and the hiss of blowing sand came back to him.

All day they travelled in the sandstorm, and Songbird dropped the rein on her pony's neck, not knowing which way to guide him. The wind died down at sunset, but when the haze of dust lifted, Songbird faced a stretch of desert, where only tiny clumps of dry weeds showed here and there, half-buried by the heaped up sand that formed small mounds about each weed.

She knew then that she was lost on the Great Desert of the Staked Plains, where no white man could venture and come out safely, and where even the best trailers of the Quahadas travelled only when the warriors had no other way of outwitting their pursuers.

As she sat on Star, looking at the endless sand, all the stories she had heard the older people tell about the suffering from thirst on the Staked Plains came back to her. They had spoken of

lost trails where the sand had shifted and buried all traces even in one hour. There had been a Quahada runner, who, lost for five days without water, had found his way back to camp but had died before he could swallow the water that the Indians held to his lips.

Songbird knew that there was no water on this desert except when the rain fell heavily, and then it gathered only for a short time in a hollow, for the hot sun and the dry sand soon made it disappear. This summer there had been no rain.

Since leaving the pool that morning, Songbird and Star had found no other water, but she had hoped that the trail of her father would lead to some. He knew all the country and just where to find water each night for his warriors and ponies. But the terrible dust storm had blinded her and the wind had blown the loose sand over the Quahada trail.

Her eyes grew big with fear, and her shoulders, which had been held so bravely when the sand storm beat upon her, now drooped as though a heavy weight were placed on her neck.

Miles and miles of silence and loneliness threatened her on every side.

Her head sank forward until it rested on Star's

shaggy mane, and her arms clung tightly about his neck. There was no one to remind her that she was the daughter of a chief. Only Star and the Great Spirit heard the sobs of a frightened, lonely little child.

But at last she raised her head, and sat thinking intently. Then she turned Star's head in the opposite direction. That morning when she had wakened, she remembered now, the sun had shone in her eyes, and she had travelled toward it until it was straight above her head.

Songbird knew that the village must lie in the same direction as the sunset. If Star could take her to the water pool once more, she could find her way to the Quahada camp. She understood now the risk of trying to follow her father, and that made her decide that she would try to return to the camp and stay there until he should come back.

The tracks made earlier in the day by Star's feet were already indistinct, as the loose sand did not hold an impression very long, and the faintest wind hid it completely. Beyond the desert a trail remained distinct for a long time.

It was growing dark. Songbird was so tired that she wanted to cry again, but she blinked

her eyes fiercely, reminding herself that her father was a chief. As they travelled toward the place where the sun set, she took a piece of the dry meat from her bundle and started to chew it. But she was so thirsty that it choked her. So she put it back uneaten.

Hopefully she looked about for a sign of a mesquite bush, knowing that she could quench her thirst by chewing the beans that grew in pods from the branches. But lack of rain had kept any beans from forming, and she remembered that the mesquite bushes near the camp had yielded no crop. Only a bit of shrivelled desert brush, half buried in the sand, met her eyes as she rode.

A terrible fear conquered her, and she struck Star's sides sharply with her moccasined heels. At once he swung into an easy, swift lope, his ears cocked and his eyes fixed straight ahead of him. Songbird did not try to guide him now, but allowed the rein to lie loosely on his neck, while she balanced herself to his movements.

At times the pony slowed down to a walk, but he did not stop, and Songbird did not have to urge him to resume his quicker gait. Where she had guided him earlier in the day, he now went

of his own free will. Some instinct beyond that of any human being told Star which way to go.

More than once Songbird, too sleepy to sit erect, laid her head on Star's neck, where the thick mane made a soft pillow. Then the pony walked very slowly and very carefully while Songbird slept. Once she slipped from his back to the soft sand. Though it wakened her at once, the fall did not hurt her, and as she lay on her back, staring up, she saw Star standing beside her. Patiently he was waiting for her to climb on his back. Then Songbird knew that her pony would not desert her, even though it were dark and he wore no hobbles.

So through the long night Star carried her safely. With the first gray light of dawn, the pony gave a soft nicker of pleasure, and broke into his swiftest run. Songbird leaned down and patted his black neck. Ahead of them loomed a group of trees, and she knew, as well as Star, that the trees grew beside the water-hole.

When they reached it, both pony and child drank as though they would never stop. Songbird bathed her face and held her arms in the water, while Star walked out to the deepest part

of the pool and stood there heaving great sighs of content.

Afterward, still standing knee deep in the pool, he stretched his neck so that he could nibble the grass growing on its edges while Songbird ate the dry meat that no longer choked her.

Then, side by side, Star and Songbird lay down to sleep.

Only the buckskin Indian doll guarded them, but its painted eyes glared so fiercely that it would have taken a very brave person to have ventured near!

Chapter XIX

WHEN Songbird awoke the next morning, Star had already eaten his breakfast, so she lost no time in satisfying her own hunger with a bit of the dried meat and pounded maize, finishing off her meal with a drink of water from the pool.

Then carefully tying up her bundle and tucking her doll into her belt, Songbird mounted her pony and started back to the village. She had no trouble following the trail now, for the ground was not so sandy or soft. Besides, Star knew his way without any guidance.

When they had left the Quahada village it had been dark, so they had travelled more slowly. It was late in the afternoon when at last they neared the hill which overlooked the camp. Songbird knew that all the women and children would be preparing the evening meal.

She felt very happy knowing that she would be with them safely in a few minutes, and she knew they would all be glad that Star had

brought her out of the terrible desert. But she was now rather ashamed of herself at having run away without telling any one of her plans. Then she hoped that her father had not returned and found her missing, for his anger at the women would have been terrible, yet they were not to blame at all.

Star loped lightly up the hill and stopped on the very top. Where Quannah had halted Running Deer and looked down on the village, Song-bird now looked down. Then she gave a startled cry.

All signs of the village had vanished. Where she had left many tepees, she now saw empty space. Where children had shouted at play, silence greeted her. Where camp fires had blazed, cold ashes stirred in the light breeze.

Scarcely believing her own eyes, she urged Star on a run down the hill, as though hoping the village might be there when she reached the very spot where the camp had once been. But it was more lonely than even the desert had been. For out there she had believed that she had a home and now she had nothing.

Almost frantic, she jumped from her pony and ran to the spot where her father's tepee had

been, calling his name over and over again, and begging him to come back to her. Nothing familiar met her eyes except the fire pit and the poles on which she had many times hung her father's moccasins to dry.

In a frenzy of grief and fear, she flung herself beside the fire pit, and Star, knowing that something was very wrong, called as loudly as he could. But no pony answered, and no Quahada woman or child came to comfort his little mistress who lay sobbing on the ground. So Star could do nothing but wait patiently.

Songbird's sobs finally stopped, and she raised herself slowly until she was sitting with her knees drawn up, her elbows propped upon them and her chin resting in her palms. For some time she sat staring at the top of the hill, while Star, only a few paces away, nibbling dry roots, paused frequently to look at her.

"My father came back while I was gone," she said to Star, at last. "He is angry with me and has moved the camp so that I cannot find him. But I will look for him until I find him and tell him I am sorry I did not obey him. I know he will not send me away from him, even though he is very angry. If he will not let me

come into his tepee, I will wait at the entrance, and maybe some day he will forgive me.”

Comforted by this thought, she ate rather sparingly of her food supply. Then she curled beside the fire pit where her father's tepee had once stood, and slept until morning, for she was very, very tired.

So soundly she slept that she did not know the coyotes, sneaking about the deserted camp site, had more than once tumbled over one another to avoid a sudden dash of an angry pony. Then, when they had sought safety from his teeth and heels, Star returned to his vigil over his little mistress.

The sun had not yet peeped over the rim of the world when Songbird and Star started on their search for the vanished Quahadas. Both of them watched for signs along the trail, and had no difficulty in finding where the lodge poles of the tepees had dragged on the ground.

Star also noticed something that puzzled him. No unshod hoof prints mingled with the Quahada trail, but there were many distinct marks of shod horses. He remembered that the Big Gray Horse and the Old White Horse, when they had first come to live among the Quahada ponies,

wore strange metal things on the bottom of their hoofs, and they had told Star and the other ponies that all the white men's horses wore these things, which they called shoes.

The Quahada ponies had thought it very strange that the white men's horses could not travel on sharp rocks with bare feet, as the Indian ponies always did.

Star had not forgotten this, nor how the two cavalry horses had limped at first, after the metal shoes had worn thin and finally fallen off in pieces. However, in a little time the Big Gray Horse and the Old White Horse had been able to scramble over rough places just as well as the Quahada ponies could do.

Songbird did not notice all these things as Star did. While they travelled she kept her eyes on the marks made by the trailing lodge poles. That was all she cared to know. For wherever the lodge poles led, she knew that she would find the Quahadas, and that her father would be with them.

For three days Songbird and Star followed, not resting until the light was too dim to see the trail. Then they lay down together on the ground till morning. Wherever water could be found,

the pony and the child drank, but as they had no way to carry water with them, both suffered from thirst many times. Only dry mud had been left in many water holes, because of the long drought.

Star's sides shrank until his ribs showed and his hips stood out in sharp points. Sparse clumps of dry grass constituted his only feed, and even that had been cropped to its roots by the big band of horses on the trail that Songbird was following.

Her own supply of food was almost gone. The third night when she opened her bundle and saw only enough for the next morning, her lips quivered as she wondered where she could find anything more to eat. Yet the next morning, after dividing what was left of her food, so as to make two meals of it, she rose courageously and resumed her journey, always keeping her eyes on the marks of the trailing lodge poles.

It was late in the afternoon of the third day when Star, looking ahead from a high bit of ground, saw an object that made his ears cock sharply and his nostrils distend, as he sniffed the air. Far away something fluttered at the tip of

a white lodge pole. Then he remembered what the Big Gray Horse and the Old White Horse had said about the flag which protected Indians who were not fighting the white men. Songbird had been so intent upon the track of the lodge poles that she did not see what Star had noticed, and when the pony gave a loud squeal and broke into a wild run, she did not know what to make of his actions.

Down the slight slope he rushed. Then Songbird saw a tall white lodge pole with something striped in red and white fluttering at its tip. She did not know what it meant, but she clung tightly to Star's mane as he ran directly toward a hollow square surrounded with strange buildings, which were different from anything she had ever seen in her life.

Fast as Star ran, Songbird was able to catch a glimpse of men near these buildings, and the men had white faces. But Star did not stop until he stood directly at the foot of the big lodge pole. There, with Songbird on his back, the pony lifted his head very high and called again and again, as loudly as he could.

Songbird, bewildered, saw men running toward her from all sides, shouting to one another.

And knowing these were the terrible white men who had carried Preloch away, and Prairie Flower, too, she bowed her head, believing that they were coming to kill her.

But as they reached her side, she saw kindly faces, and heard voices that were not harsh or threatening. One man spoke to the others, who listened respectfully. Then another man led Star between a row of buildings, which Songbird stared at, half frightened, half curious.

Back of these long buildings, which were made with places where men looked out at her, she saw a great line of the familiar Quahada tepees, and in front of the very largest one stood her father, who started toward her, calling her name.

Like a flash, Songbird jumped from Star's back, past the men who watched her, and then she was in her father's arms. She knew that he was not angry with her, and nothing else mattered now. She had heard his voice and had seen his joy, which this time he had not tried to hide, even though he was the chief of the Quahada Comanches.

Chapter XX

THE days that followed were the happiest of Songbird's life. Not only was she with her father and the rest of her people once more, but she knew that there would be no more fighting between the Quahadas and the white men. Quannah had given his pledge of peace, and now the white people were his friends.

Little white children, dressed in clothes that seemed strange to Songbird, came to the Quahada camp and brought things that were very nice to eat. It did not take long for the Quahada children to rush eagerly and greet these visitors, though of course not one Quahada child could understand what the white children were saying. But that made no difference.

Sometimes the white mothers came, too. They brought clothing like the things the white children wore, and the Quahada squaws were much pleased when they saw their own youngsters dressed in the new finery, with shoes and stockings on their feet.

While the young Comanches walked awkwardly in their new things, or talked among themselves about the toys that had been given them, Songbird sat apart, silent but happy. A wonderful doll with real yellow hair, and blue eyes that closed in sleep sat primly beside her, but a dirty buckskin Indian doll was more often hugged to Songbird's breast.

Then one great day Songbird was taken to play with two children in the home of an officer. They brought toys and games, and she watched each thing they did, trying to act in the same way. Her father had told her to watch and learn to be like the white children, now.

After a little while she stopped playing and listened to the most beautiful sounds she had ever heard. Then she rose to her feet and moved softly toward the room from which the music came.

Standing by the door she stared at one of the ladies who was seated before a big box that had a great many teeth, and as her fingers touched these white, shining teeth, the Spirit in the Box sang sweetly. Wide-eyed with wonder, Songbird listened without moving. She heard in the music the wind blowing through trees, the noise

of the stream, the song of wild birds and the cry of the Thunder Bird.

The music stopped, and the lady, turning suddenly, saw the child in the doorway. Smiling, she beckoned Songbird, who came forward shyly. The little brown hand was lifted by the white, ringed hand of the lady. Songbird's fingers were pressed on the teeth of the box that sang, and as it spoke to her, Songbird's big, black eyes sparkled with joy, while her solemn little face lighted with a smile.

Then the lady motioned her to a chair, and for a long time Songbird sat listening to the singing of the Spirit in the Box. All this she told her father when she went back to his tepee. Each day after that when she went to play with the children, the mother of the children first took Songbird to the room where the Spirit in the Box sang for her.

And each day her father talked to her, telling her that she should learn everything that the white people knew, even how to make the Spirit in the Box sing when her fingers touched it.

There were many councils between Quannah and his head chiefs with the big white chiefs. But there was no more talk of war among the Qua-

hadas. And one day Quannah told Songbird that they were free to go and build their camp again. Songbird did not tell him that she did not want to part from her new friends, but he understood her wistful face.

"I will come back many times to see them," he said, "and you shall come with me. Our new camp will not be far away from here."

So she was happy again. And the next day the Quahadas set busily to work taking down all the teepees and preparing to move to their own camping grounds. Songbird and Quannah did not spend these last hours with the Indians, for they were in the home of an officer.

After they had all eaten lunch together, the officer led the way to the front porch. There, before the house, stood a soldier holding the Big Gray Horse by its bridle, and on its back was a cavalry saddle.

"The horse and bridle and saddle are gifts to you from General Mackenzie," the officer said to Quannah, and an interpreter, who knew how to speak both the white men's language and that of the Comanches, repeated it to the chief.

The officer spoke again. This time he looked at Songbird and smiled, while the interpreter

said, "The officers give Quannah's daughter the black pony which carried her into Fort Sill."

Then Quannah and Songbird noticed a soldier leading Star to the gate. Star's little mistress ran down the porch steps and did not stop until her arms were about the pony's neck.

When she was on Star's back, and Quannah had mounted the Big Gray Horse, Songbird saw her father hold out his hand to the officers who had gathered about them. Very gravely she did the same thing. None of the officers smiled as they took her small, brown hand, for she was a daughter of a great chief who had won their respect as a soldier and as a man.

Side by side Quannah and Songbird went slowly along the gravel road in front of the officers' homes; but when they had reached a point directly opposite the tall white lodge pole where the flag fluttered gracefully, Quannah reined the Big Gray Horse, so that it faced the lodge pole. Songbird did the same.

Her father lifted his hand, as she had seen the men and officers do many times. Without understanding, and without hesitation, Songbird, too, raised her hand and saluted the flag.

Her father smiled approval, then he said:

“That is the flag of the Great Father, and we are his children now. It is as my mother, Preloch, would wish; and it is best for me, for you, and for all the Quahadas. The white men are our brothers. Together we shall dwell in peace.”

So they rode to the place where their new camp was to be built, not far away from the garrison. Quannah explained, as they rode, that the buffalo hunters could not come there to fight the Quahadas, and that there would be food enough for the Indians, and that now the white soldiers would be their friends. He told her how he planned to make his people understand the white men’s ways, their children to learn the things that white children were taught, and then, some day, maybe, he could bring back Preloch and Prairie Flower. For the officers had told him, through the interpreter, that his mother and sister were both dead.

Little Prairie Flower had lived only a short time after reaching the home of the white people, and Preloch, grieving constantly for her son, had died a year later, so the mother and the baby had been buried among the white people.

The officers who had told him this had shown their sympathy in their faces, and when Quan-

nah asked if they thought that some day he might bring his mother and sister back to sleep among their own people, the officers had all been sure that the Great Father would think it was just and right.

Then Quannah and Songbird reached a little knoll where they had a view of a wide sweep of prairie land, broken by the outline of trees along the banks of a stream. Sitting silently on their horses, father and child gazed at the place where a new era was to dawn for their people.

Star's nose rubbed the neck of the Big Gray Horse, but his friend paid no attention to him. He was too busy watching a distant object which Star had not seen. Then, he, too, saw a slowly moving black pony. Its head hung dejectedly and it stumbled wearily as it approached them. Star's loud, shrill call caused the black pony to stop suddenly and fling its head high, while it gave answer. Neither Quannah nor Songbird tried to check the swift pace of the Big Gray Horse and Star, as, side by side, they raced joyously to meet Running Deer.

When they met, Star pawed the ground in his delight, and his mother kept nipping his shoulder with her teeth to tell how glad she was to find

him. Later, as she trotted beside him, when Quannah and Songbird again rode forward, Running Deer told her colt how she, returning to camp with Quannah, had found that Star and Songbird both were missing.

After the white soldiers had captured and taken Quannah and all the braves and women and children to the garrison, Running Deer, assured now that her master would not need her for some time, stole quietly from the garrison one night to search for Star and Songbird; for Star was very dear to her, and she had noticed, too, how Quannah, when alone, grieved for his beloved daughter who was lost. She had come back to the Quahada camp and waited there several days, feeling sure that Star and Songbird would return. When they did not, she continued on her way to find them, and finally came to the Great Desert of the Staked Plains. With sorrowing heart she had reluctantly turned her steps back to the garrison, for now she knew not where to search for them on the vast, trackless sand plains; and she herself was weak and lean from thirst and hunger. Imagine, then, her joy upon finding Star and his little mistress safe and happy. But neither Star nor Running Deer

knew that they alone were left of the once great Quahada pony herd. All the others were dead.

As the sun went down that evening, Quannah and Songbird, with the Big Gray Horse, Running Deer, and Star, reached the place where the new village was to be built. Back of them, on the road, the Quahadas toiled, but the eyes that watched the setting sun were hopeful. They knew that it would rise again to-morrow.

Chapter XXI

QUANNAH kept his pledge. Never again did the Quahada Comanches war with the white people, for when their chief had given his word of honour, it became their honour to uphold him and keep his promise.

Near the garrison of Fort Sill he taught his tribe the best ways of the white men, and he did his utmost to preserve a sense of fairness and justice in all his transactions with his own people as well as with the white men. The children of the Quahadas were educated, and so Quannah's little daughter was taught the things that white children learn.

Songbird saw her father honoured by the most prominent men of the United States; saw him living in a large house that was built and furnished and given to him as a token of regard from white people who had learned to understand and admire the "White Comanche Chief." She saw him a guest in homes of the most noted

men in the great city of Washington, and she watched him ride in the big parade in Washington when Theodore Roosevelt was elected for the second term as President of the United States.

All that Moko had predicted the day Songbird had sat watching the old Picture Maker work on the big buffalo robe had come true. Even Quannah's desire to have his mother, Preloch, and his baby sister, Prairie Flower, come back to sleep among the Quahada people had been fulfilled.

The Congress of the United States, twenty-four years after Quannah had given his pledge of peace passed a law which gave an appropriation of a thousand dollars for a monument to be erected to the memory of Cynthia Ann Parker, whom the Quahadas called Preloch. It not only honoured the mother of Quannah, but was also an acknowledgment of the valued services of her son, in coöperating with the United States to keep peace between the Indians and the white people.

And so Preloch and Prairie Flower came back at last to the Quahadas, and when Quannah died, he slept beside them, while the Indians

mourned the passing of the greatest chief they had ever known. Untutored and unlettered, he had taught his people the lesson of forgiveness and of honour, and in so doing he had won the respect of all men.

Moko's words were again proved true when a town, Nocona, was named after Quannah's father, Peta Nocona; and to-day, still another town bears the name of the son, Quannah.

Star and Running Deer, after living happily many years, at last went to join the other Quahada ponies in the Happy Hunting Grounds.

Sometimes when the Thunder Bird wings its way across the sky, and white people think they hear distant thunder, Songbird stands with uplifted face. It is not thunder, but the sound of galloping hoofs that she hears.

Beyond the dark shadows of the Thunder Bird's wings, she knows that Quannah is riding on Running Deer. Near him is Peta Nocona, and with them rides Preloch, holding little Prairie Flower closely against her breast.

On the other side of Running Deer gallops a black pony without a rider, his thick mane and long black tail streaming like the edges of a dark cloud. Songbird knows that the pony is

Star, and that some day she will ride him again beside her father.

As the thunder dies away, she smiles and turns back to the work that Quannah left for her to do, until she, too, shall answer the cry of the Great Eagle.

THE END

CENTRAL CIRCULATION
CHILDREN'S ROOM

